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Oral Roberts Centennial

A Celebration of His Life, Ministry, Theology, and Impact

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Spiritus

ORU JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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EDITOR'S NOTE

JEFFREY S. LAMP

With this issue of *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology*, we take opportunity to commemorate a historic moment. The year 2018 marks the centennial anniversary of the birth of Oral Roberts. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of this towering figure on the American religious landscape. He was a visionary in the truest sense of the word, and over the decades often puzzled observers as his ministry changed course, not with the times, but in many ways changing the times themselves. To be sure, it would make sense for one healed so dramatically of a debilitating disease to embark upon a healing ministry. It would also make sense for one heeled in classical Pentecostalism to be a major contributor to the direction the fledgling movement would take throughout the twentieth century. What may not seem so sensible is for one so prominent in a theological tradition caricatured, at least early on, as anti-intellectual to build a world-class university, or for one best known as a healing evangelist to build a state of the art medical facility. Yet in all of these areas, whether sensible or not, Oral Roberts was an innovator. And in this centennial anniversary of the year of his birth, *Spiritus* dedicates an issue to examine some aspects of this complex religious leader, reminding us all of the impact he made on American, indeed global, Christianity.

For this issue, Wonsuk Ma, now Dean of the College of Theology and Ministry at Oral Roberts University, has collected a dozen studies covering several areas of Roberts' life, thought, ministry, and legacy. All of the contributors have a connection to Oral Roberts University, whether as students, faculty, and/or administrators. So it is, in effect, an in-house offering to the university community and the Spirit-empowered community at large, a remembrance of a figure who, now gone, may get overlooked in today's fast-paced world of Christian theology and ministry, a world often more intrigued with "what's happening now" than with holy memory. The result, we believe, is an

even-handed and thoughtful examination of the man Oral Roberts. Indeed, this issue may serve as a primer, a textbook of sorts, on the work of the man whose life is at the foundation of the university, yet who may not be in the conscious thought of students who have passed through the doors of the university since his retirement from active ministry. I would like to thank all of the contributors to this issue, as well as the editorial staff, for their work and dedication in bringing this labor of love to fruition. May it benefit the university and the kingdom of God.

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WHY ORAL ROBERTS STUDIES?

AN EXPANDED EDITORIAL MARKING THE HUNDREDTH YEAR OF HIS BIRTH

WONSUK MA

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Introduction

My own experience with Oral Roberts University (ORU) is relatively short, about two years at this writing. Although I grew up as a Pentecostal believer, later a minister and missionary from Korea, my academic pursuits in Pentecostal studies did not intersect with Oral Roberts (OR). My first attention was to Asian Pentecostalism with an established platform of Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Philippines, and *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*. When my academic horizon expanded at Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, global Pentecostalism in the context of world Christianity loomed high. Therefore, names familiar to me were William Seymour, Pandita Ramabai, David Yonggi Cho, and the like. The only glimpse of Roberts was several TV sermons I watched during my doctoral studies in the 1990s. For an unknown reason, his close relationship with, and influence on, Cho was not known even to his church folks, although some of us closely followed the impact of Watchman Nee, Robert Schuller, and Norman Vincent Peale.

When the possibility of joining the theology faculty of ORU was actively explored, I began to search for studies on Oral Roberts in academic journals on American church history, the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, theology, and ministry. After a disappointing yield, I moved to Ph.D. dissertations, which again resulted in a very small number. However, an Amazon.com search yielded “tons” of books either by him or on him: ranging from sermons and autobiographies, to

commentaries and theology books. Although mostly written in popular format and language, they are valuable data for research.

Among biographies, including ones written by Roberts himself, one work stands out: *Oral Roberts: An American Life* by David E. Harrell, Jr. (1987).¹ This massive book (622 pages, including notes) is a gem in Oral Roberts studies. However, this book has one serious weakness: the biography is not complete, as Roberts lived twenty-two years after the publication of the book. There are no other equally critical biographies of his life to complement or cross-reference Harrell's monumental work.

Any new study would begin with a bibliographic survey. In a sense, the introductory part of this reflection is a bibliographic observation: stating the meager amount of critical work on OR, Daniel Isgrigg, the new director of the Holy Spirit Research Center, lays the first step towards the cataloging of relevant resources to facilitate future studies on Roberts. Due to Roberts' keen interest in the media as an effective tool for communication, many books, pamphlets, periodicals, and audio and video records are available. In addition to the holdings at the Center, there is a separate archive at ORU that holds a large number of records. Equally fruitful would be the holdings at the Oral Roberts Ministries. The process of cataloging and digitizing some of these resources needed for potential studies is underway—however, some issues of copyright must be settled before making many of these items available for researchers. Reports on Roberts by Christian and secular media are another important area for research. For example, *Christian Century* published a large number of studies on Roberts, many of which were critical assessments. This first bibliographic effort in this volume will continue to grow.

This editorial identifies several key reasons why OR studies would be an important contribution of ORU to studies of American church history, the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement, and global Christianity. This expanded editorial will also serve potential areas of fruitful research while placing the studies included in this issue of the journal as examples.

ORU and OR Studies

As a university bearing Roberts' name, ORU is expected to be a resource center for OR studies. While the university has faithfully served as the depository of OR resources, it has not been intentional in producing or promoting such studies. Considering the national and global impact of his ministry, the scarcity of OR studies is in part to be blamed on the university that bears his name.

But the importance of OR studies to ORU is far more than the obligatory guardianship of OR resources. It has to do with the identity of ORU as a learning and research community. When I first visited the campus, I was immediately surprised and impressed by the ecclesial diversity of the theology faculty. Yes, I had known that ORU was a charismatic university with no particular denominational affiliation. However, discovering the Catholic, Orthodox, and Episcopalian members of the faculty was not what I anticipated. Then I began to ask, "Where did it come from?" It has much to do, I discovered, with Roberts' journey through several ecclesial traditions. The much-publicized healing teams program of the university is another example. Its multidisciplinary approach to the transformation of a target community finds its origin in Roberts' radically holistic understanding of God's healing. Kevin Schneider's historical probing is only the beginning of rich and fruitful mining of Roberts' unique theology of healing. There are many keywords and values in the university that trace their origins to Roberts: "whole person education," "impacting the world with God's healing," the global vision, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, commitment to mission, "every man's [sic!] world," and many others.

If ORU desires to find its uniqueness in the ever-expanding sea of Christian higher education, it is essential to find where and how it began. But more importantly, the most foundational question will be: Who was Oral Roberts and what motivated him to establish the university? It has something no other institutions have as part of its very core: Oral Roberts. He was a son of Pentecostalism and a father of the Charismatic Movement, and the institution has him in its identity. Indeed, he is the unique and valuable asset to the university. William

(Billy) Wilson, the current president of the university, rightly draws the institution's core identity (or "DNA" in his words) from its founder. In the context of today's global Christianity, this legacy places the ORU community in an extremely rare, privileged place.

Oral Roberts in Studies of American Christianity

Oral Roberts stands tall in twentieth-century North American Christianity. It is argued that Billy Graham and Oral Roberts are the two "giants"² of evangelism in this era. Their relationship began by Graham's controversial (among his staff) and surprise (to Roberts and his colleagues) invitation to the Berlin Congress on World Evangelism in 1966. It is agreed that the conference marks a watershed moment when Christian mission, which had run as a united movement from the Edinburgh Missionary Conference (1910), was divided between the ecumenical and evangelical camps. Pentecostals had rarely been recognized by the mainstream churches, even if their missionary zeal and success were already noticed. Roberts' participation in the Congress had ever changed the scope and impact of his ministry and his engagement with the broader church world. Although not included in the present issue, a scholar has already begun his research on the relationship between these two Christian leaders. With his innovative TV ministry via a nationwide network carrying his message of healing and a "good God," he stirred the American Christian landscape once and for all. Among his significant feats is the establishment of the university with his stubborn persistence in maintaining its unique spiritual values, the opening of the City of Faith as a holistic healing and research center, and forming a gravitating center for the fledgling Charismatic Movement. His message of a "good God" raised many eyebrows, but he was taking his social context into his theology. He once said, "I tried poverty, but it didn't work!" At the same time, he intentionally distanced himself from the emerging Word of Faith (or also the Prosperity) Movement.

The biggest question one can raise is why no mainstream American church historian has paid any sustained attention to him and his impact on American Christianity. As mentioned above and confirmed by

Isgrigg's initial list of sources for Oral Roberts study, only several Ph.D. dissertations were written to provide critical and in-depth studies. Most, if not all, of them are comparative studies, treating Roberts along with several others, and most were written in the 1980s. Among graduates in the two doctoral programs at ORU (ministry and education), no dissertation was dedicated to the study of Roberts. We are pleased, for this reason, to provide a valuable study on Roberts' TV ministry, whose example many have followed, taken from Jim Hunter's dissertation.³ The study on the root of Roberts' theology of healing by Vinson Synan and another on the never-reported second healing experience of Roberts by Synan and Isgrigg exemplify the formation of one's theology and spirituality through the influence of one's experience, church tradition, social context, and reading of the Scriptures. Also significant is the study by Timothy Hatcher on Roberts' Native American roots, which was recently disputed,⁴ and a valuable study by Thomson K. Mathew on the development of Roberts' healing theology through the years.

The editors of *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* are committed to encouraging studies on Roberts. In the first two relaunch issues, such studies were published. This special issue of the journal is dedicated fully to studies on Oral Roberts to commemorate the one hundredth year of his birth, and we hope that this will encourage others to develop their interest in OR studies. The newly launched Ph.D. program in theology at ORU may recruit students to research on his life, ministry, theology, and impact. This "insider" work is important, as it will eventually inspire outsiders to take his role in American Christianity in earnest. To challenge the university community, I offer an example of this kind of work. It is well known that David Yonggi Cho of Yoido Full Gospel Church of South Korea, who has openly admitted the influence of Roberts, maintained a close relationship until OR's passing. (Another study on this relationship is being prepared for the next issue of the journal). When Cho retired from his fifty years of pastoral leadership in 2008, a substantial collection of academic studies was published,⁵ and another group of publications is already out to mark the sixtieth anniversary of his ministry. It is not to erect another monument to hail a hero; it is to learn from him and help new generations to stand on his and others' shoulders to advance knowledge for the kingdom's sake.

Roberts' Role in the Development of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity

Roberts' contribution to the growth of Pentecostalism owes much to his tent healing crusades and the message of a "good God." His mammoth-sized tents broke several records, and claims of miraculous healing caught the imagination of the media. He could be the first Pentecostal who was intensively covered by secular media, especially when his TV programs began to reach the living rooms of millions of Americans. The "virtual" Pentecostal church was born, yet, not without controversies. However, his place in American Pentecostalism was one among many figures. Thus, Synan calls him "a son of Pentecostalism." However, his role in the emerging Charismatic Movement was decisive.⁶ And the process through which Roberts experienced changes had a direct impact on the university. According to Synan, Roberts' contribution to the Charismatic Movement was predicated on a radical change in his ecclesial positioning. The first step, Synan contends, was his entry into the wider evangelical world, providentially facilitated by Billy Graham at the Berlin conference (1966). Through his participation in the conference, Roberts gained "a wider view of the body of Christ and a new sense of mission."⁷ This new relationship was publicly demonstrated when Graham spoke at the dedication of the ORU campus in 1967. His move to the Methodist Church in 1968 is considered to be the second step of his journey towards ecumenical engagement. To many, this was more than a change of denominational affiliation; it was a radical theological realignment from his narrowly defined denominational Pentecostalism to liberal Methodist tradition. However, it was the theologically "liberal" mainline churches where the emerging Charismatic Movement found fertile ground, not the evangelical cousins. Roberts, as expected, became a leading figure in the fast-growing charismatic sectors in the Methodist Church. For the one-million-strong Methodist charismatics in the U.S., Oral Roberts became their hero as a professed charismatic.⁸ The re-opened Graduate School of Theology was a Methodist school in every aspect: in leadership, faculty, and ecclesial endorsement. Although this surprise partnership did not last any longer than two decades, this change had a substantial

impact on the nature and theology of the whole ORU community. Roberts then aligned with and led the burgeoning interdenominational Charismatic Movement. He began his own association of charismatic ministers called “International Charismatic Bible Ministers” and held annual conferences throughout the 1990s. Most, if not all, of the famous charismatic ministers of that decade attended: Billy Jo Dougherty, Kenneth Copeland, Jessie Duplantis, Keith Butler, Earl Paulk, Benson Idahosa, Marilyn Hickey, Benny Hinn, among many others. Consequently, the university, especially its School of Theology, had still another theological and ecclesial repositioning with a new dean, Larry Lea, drawn from the Charismatic Movement. Soon, the ORU campus became the visible center for the Charismatic Movement, and its chapel services brought many key leaders of the movement from a wide range of church traditions, including Roman Catholics. After the retirement of Roberts, this “journey” did continue.

The series of changes, sometimes quite radical, is part of the history and identity of the university today. Although historical questions may be important, the most important is investigating the theological impact of each major realignment. This brief survey already introduced almost all the major theological players in today’s world: Pentecostal, charismatic, evangelical, mainline Protestant, and Catholic. This in part explains the ecumenical diversity observed in the theology faculty of the university. A new repositioning does not simply mean the assumption of a new ecclesial theology: rather, it is adding another theological layer to the previously accumulated deposit. Often such a process is far from neat; indeed, it appears messy. It is particularly the case when a seemingly “accidental” element is introduced to the already confusing state, such as the association with the Word of Faith movement. But this is precisely what has made the theological identity of ORU unique and creative. It has afforded a capacity to embrace a wide range of theological traditions, around one shared commonality: the belief in, and experience with, the reality of God through the Holy Spirit. Several studies in the journal address this important aspect. And all of them come with an assumption that the theological formation of the ORU community was not an accumulation of random accidents. Indeed, God’s wisdom has been the main mover of the journey, in

spite of human shortsightedness at times. Wilson's "DNA" sermon leads the list, followed by Samuel Thorpe's theological overview of Roberts. Schneider's study on the healing team concept, albeit historical in nature, demonstrates the development of Roberts' theology of healing. Mathew takes his theology of healing directly and traces its development over the decades. Isgrigg's study on Roberts' theology of the baptism in the Holy Spirit signals the ORU community's growing interest in the theological orientation of the university, via the lens of Roberts.

Influence on Global Christianity

Until the opening of the university and TV ministry, Oral Roberts' influence was limited to North America. Sensing that the era of the tent meetings was coming to a close, the institution was established, initially to bring Christian leaders from different parts of the world to Tulsa for training. Therefore, the first program was the School of Evangelism. The often-quoted vision statement of the university speaks of this founding vision:

Raise up your students to hear My voice, to go where My light is dim, where My voice is heard small, and My healing power is not known, even to the uttermost bounds of the earth. Their work will exceed yours, and in this I am well pleased.

This commission is evangelistic and missional, defining the actors ("students"), the action ("to go"), the implied message (in the way of "light" and "voice"), the dynamic ("healing power"), the extent ("the uttermost bounds of the earth"), and the ultimate outcome ("pleasing God"). The mission statement reflects the vision of the university and adds "wheels": "To build Holy Spirit empowered leaders through whole person education to impact the world with God's healing." In addition to the thousands of ORU graduates impacting "the world with God's healing," Eim's study on the Korean Doctor of Ministry program showcases how 200 or so graduates from a broad spectrum of Korean Christianity were equipped to strengthen their ministry

impact. He argues that the program served as a unique process to spread the movement of God's healing (literally) throughout the nation and beyond. The study on the healing teams illustrates a similar impact through its holistic approach to community development.

Now positioning itself in the context of fast-changing global Christianity, ORU prepares itself to serve the global Spirit-empowered movement, which is the fastest growing segment of all religions. For example, its new Ph.D. theology program takes global Christianity and the Spirit-empowerment movement as the two foundational layers. The Contextual Theology track facilitates research that incorporates a variety of contextual elements to construct unique local theologies. These become critical pieces of the puzzle that will picture what the Holy Spirit is doing globally. Empowered21 is the university's sister network bringing an incredible variety of Spirit-empowered worldwide communities into fellowship, celebration, and strategizing. They are the primary constituencies of the university's work, and this is clearly in line with the global vision of Roberts for the university. His TV ministry, originally aimed at reaching millions of living rooms in America, has had an extremely long shelf-life. When I visited Lusaka, Zambia, years ago, one of the public TV stations broadcasted Roberts' program on a Sunday morning. An African scholar contends that "his use of media in the popularization of a certain type of Pentecostal culture has been intense and immense."⁹ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu assesses Roberts' financial "sowing and reaping" principle as a "transactional" relationship between God and his people.¹⁰ In his view, this is a forerunner of the problematic prosperity gospel, which has done much harm to African Christianity. The ORU community is, then, called to provide careful theological discernment on this controversial and yet powerful part of the Christian message.¹¹ The global impact of Roberts' life and ministry will require an ongoing assessment.

In Closing

The present issue of the journal is a modest addition to the small body of Oral Roberts studies. But, it also signals a new beginning, finally, to bring to the fore the significant impact of Roberts on the ORU

community, American Christianity, the global Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement, and global Christianity. The ORU community will continue to function as the custodian of Roberts' material.

The Holy Spirit Research Center, the co-publisher of the journal, has been committing its efforts to capture eyewitness memories of Roberts' generation. His life, ministry, theology, and impact will be the subjects of the continuing study not only by the ORU community but also by others. Thus, readers are cordially invited to join in this effort. The ultimate motivation is not to erect another monument for Roberts, but for new generations to be able to advance God's kingdom by standing on his shoulders.

This special issue of the journal is organized in the order of OR's life, ministry, theology, and impact. As the lead editor of the issue, I would like to express my deep appreciation to the contributors who have brought their valuable studies so that we can begin this "new era" of OR studies. My editorial colleagues spent long hours verifying references, working with the authors, and copyediting each study. This special issue is a brilliant example of the journal partnership between the Holy Spirit Research Center and the College of Theology and Ministry of Oral Roberts University. Through all these efforts, our prayer is: May the empowering work of the Holy Spirit expand far and wide!



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Notes

- 1 David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985).
- 2 David E. Harrell, Jr., *All Things Are Possible: The Healing & Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1975), 27–52, which forms a chapter entitled "Two Giants," in which he singles out William Branham and Oral Roberts.
- 3 Jim E. Hunter, "A Gathering of Sects: Revivalistic Pluralism in Tulsa, Oklahoma,

1945–1985” (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986).

4 Joseph P. Gone, “Indigenous Healing Past and Present: Exploding Persistent Binaries,” in *Indigenous Cultures and Mental Health Counselling: Four Directions for Integration with Counselling Psychology*, ed. Suzanne L. Stewart, Roy Moodley, and Ashley Hyatt (New York: Routledge, 2016), viii.

5 In 2008, a massive collection of five volumes was published to mark the event. Youngsan Theological Institute, ed., *Dr. Yonggi Cho’s Ministry and Theology: A Commemorative Collection for the 50th Anniversary of Dr. Yonggi Cho’s Ministry*, 5 vols. (Gunpo, Korea: Hansei University Logos, 2008); studies in English in vols. 1–2, and those in Korean in vols. 3–5. Glancing through the first two volumes, the following section titles are found: “Good God and Man” (with contributions by Rodrigo D. Tano, Donald W. Dayton, Young Hoon Lee, Konrad Stock, and others); “Blessing and Healing” (with contributions by Vinson Synan, Thomson Mathew, Sam Hwan Kim, and others); “Hope and the Kingdom of God” (with contributors including Jürgen Moltmann, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Hwa Yung, and Christoph Schwobel), and “The Holy Spirit and Pentecostal Theology” (including contributions by William W. Menzies, Allan Anderson, Myung Soo Park, and others). What impressed me most is the attention he has received from worldwide scholars.

6 Vinson Synan, “Oral Roberts: Son of Pentecostalism, Father of the Charismatic Movement,” *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 2:1–2 (2017), 5–21.

7 Synan, “Oral Roberts,” 14.

8 Synan, “Oral Roberts,” 16–17.

9 J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Your Miracle is on the Way’: Oral Roberts and Mediated Pentecostalism in Africa,” *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 3:1 (Spring 2018), 5–26.

10 Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Your Miracle is on the Way,’” 10.

11 There are several helpful resources: (Lausanne) Theology Working Group, “A Statement on the Prosperity Gospel,” January 2010, n.p., <https://www.lausanne.org/content/a-statement-on-the-prosperity-gospel> (13 August 2018); Wonsuk Ma, “Blessing in Pentecostal Theology and Mission,” in *Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity*, ed. W. Ma, V-M. Kärkkäinen and J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2014), 272–91.

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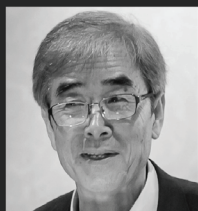
ORAL ROBERTS UNIVERSITY

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Ph.D. in Theology

ORU's College of Theology & Ministry is excited to announce the launch of its Ph.D. Program in Fall 2019. This degree explores the contextual theologies of global Christianity and the phenomenal growth and emerging scholarship within the global Spirit-empowered movement. It aims to equip scholars and practitioners to engage, impact, and serve the Kingdom of God.

Among the teaching faculty of world-renowned scholars in Pentecostal/Charismatic Studies are these:



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AN EARLY ACCOUNT OF ORAL ROBERTS' HEALING TESTIMONY

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Key Words *Oral Roberts, history, tuberculosis, healing testimony*

Abstract

The story of Oral Roberts' healing is well documented. However, recently a discovery was made of an early testimony in the *Eastern Oklahoma Conference News* of the Pentecostal Holiness Church that provides new details about the early years of his life and ministry. This testimony from 1939 includes details from the first few years of his evangelistic ministry and a different account of both the nature of his sickness and the circumstances of his healing. This article will also explore the possible factors that contributed to the differences in this testimony from his later accounts.

This edition of *Spiritus* is dedicated to new research on the impact Oral Roberts has made on the global Spirit-empowered movement. A volume like this might warrant a biographical sketch of Roberts' life, although his story is well documented. However, while doing research for this volume, the authors discovered some previously unknown information on Roberts' early ministry in the *East Oklahoma Conference News* of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, held in the Holy Spirit Research Center.¹ As a young evangelist in Oklahoma,

Roberts contributed several articles to the paper and was featured as an evangelist prior to becoming the pastor of the Shawnee Pentecostal Holiness Church. To our delight, we discovered that he also served a year as the editor of the paper (September 1943 to September 1944) while he was the pastor in Shawnee.

In 1943, Roberts was asked to step in as editor for Rayford Bullard, who was called away to work at the publishing house in Franklin Springs, Georgia.² During his year as editor, Roberts often wrote about issues taking place in the denomination and continued the tradition of highlighting evangelistic works taking place in the conference,³ including that of his parents.⁴ Shortly after Bullard returned to resume his duties, Roberts decided to leave his pastorate in Shawnee for evangelistic meetings in North Carolina in August of 1945.⁵ From there, he spent a short time as a pastor in Toccoa, Georgia, before returning to Oklahoma to pastor in Enid and enroll in Phillips Seminary in 1946.⁶ A year later, Roberts made the decision to launch into full time healing ministry.

Below is a reprint of an article in the *East Oklahoma Conference News* from October 5, 1939, in which the editor, Oscar Moore, asked Roberts to give a short account of his testimony to introduce himself to the readers.⁷ This account is the earliest known telling of Roberts' early life and gives several details of his early career as a rising evangelist. He reports that in the first few years of his ministry in early revivals in Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma, he preached a staggering 600 times and recorded over 400 salvations.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In keeping with my announced plan I am giving you a brief life story of another one of our young ministers. This month I introduce Rev. Oral Roberts, who I believe is the youngest Ordained Minister in the East Okla. Conf. I have asked him to write the story for me, here it is.

I was born Jan. 24, 1918, in a little log cabin fifteen miles N. W. of Ada. I met a cold reception for the day was blustery. The day of rejoicing was soon over, however, and I settled down to the regular routine of life.

There is nothing eventful in my life until the day of my conversion and call to the ministry—except a few things which led up to it. At the age of fifteen, I felt as if I wanted to leave home and try life alone—so against the advice of my parents I went with my old High School Coach to Atoka to play ball and go to school. All was well for the first seven months but one night while in the second game of a basketball tournament, I took the flu, my health broke, and I had to go back home—a sick boy.

For sixty days death hovered near and had it not been for the love of a merciful Savior I could not have lived through the suffering. Fearing my hour of death was near, I called in my school mates and gave them my books, and at the same time told them good bye, meanwhile my parents were praying for me—even whole churches—and at last I opened my heart, prayed with all the earnestness of my soul, and God saved me.

My strength returned and with it came the call from God to the ministry. I really intended to preach, but I began an association with a number of unsaved boys and girls and soon lost my experience.

In 1934, after my parents moved to Stratford, I started to school there but at the end of the 6th week I had a nervous breakdown and had to quit. I stayed in bed for five months. Those were lonely days for all of us, but on the 7th of Feb. during family prayer, I called on God in my distress and suffering, and God heard my earnest cry and saved me again. A call came the second time to enter the ministry—and immediately, I began to mend.

In the month of August 1935, I preached my first sermon in Homer School house five miles east of Ada. Three were saved that night.

In 1936 I was licensed to preach by the Conference and entered full time ministry—since my father was sent to pastor the Westville church. Since then I have been preaching the glorious gospel in my humble and simple way, and have seen numbers of souls come to God.

On Christmas day, 1938, I was united in holy wedlock with Evelyn Lutman Fahnestock, who had been teaching school for the past three years.

During this time I've written a thirty-two page book entitled "Salvation by the Blood" and a four page pamphlet on "Character Building."

It has been my pleasure to conduct revivals in the following places: Gainesville and Weslaco, Texas; Rogers, Ark.; Memphis, Tenn.; Ada, Westville, Wagoner, Sand Springs, Okmulgee, Muskogee, Braggs, Konawa, Seminole, Fox, Okemah, Cromwell, Sulphur, Durant, and Okla. City in 2nd church in Oklahoma.

I have preached approximately 600 times, 400 have been saved, 125 sanctified, 98 received the Holy Ghost, 187 added to the church, 69 baptized in water, and I have performed 5 wedding ceremonies.

In conclusion let me say that life with this glorious Pentecostal Experience is a happy one, and I can see greater things ahead, if I stay true to Christ.

What is noteworthy about this biographical sketch is the way he tells the testimony of his healing. In Roberts' later autobiographies, he describes the details of his collapse during a basketball game, being diagnosed with tuberculosis, and being bedridden for months.⁸ During this time of sickness, he had two significant experiences that led to his recovery. The first took place when at his weakest point his father prayed all night at his bed. Because of these prayers, Roberts received salvation and God gave him strength to stand up for the first time in months.⁹ A few weeks later, after his parents moved to Stratford, Oklahoma, he attended a tent revival where he was prayed for by Rev. George Moncey.¹⁰ After Moncey rebuked the sickness, Roberts testified that power touched his lungs and he was instantly healed of tuberculosis.¹¹

In this previously unknown 1939 account, Roberts tells a somewhat different story. He curiously describes his illness as only "a flu" that

“broke his health,” but does not mention it was tuberculosis. The diagnosis by the doctors that it was tuberculosis is a significant part of his story considering his family history and Native American heritage.¹² There is no doubt that he was fully aware that it was tuberculosis. In later accounts, Roberts recalls, “I began to think of all the Indians I had seen with tuberculosis, of those I had seen die as I accompanied Papa on his preaching tours among the Indian people.”¹³ Yet, in the 1939 account, Roberts says he recovered from his “broken health” after his father prayed for him and he received his first salvation experience before moving to Stratford. He goes on to claim that after they moved to Stratford, he had a second salvation experience wherein he would “begin to mend” and was called to ministry. Furthermore, Roberts’ testimony in the July 11, 1935, edition of the *Advocate* indicates he was still struggling with sickness despite having been saved, sanctified, and called to preach.¹⁴

It is also noteworthy that there is no mention of his healing experience with George Moncey in the tent revival near Ada, Oklahoma.¹⁵ The only healing he reports is recovering from a “nervous breakdown” that kept him in bed for five months. Later accounts describe the agony of his suffering during the sickness, but do not mention such a mental episode.¹⁶ Instead of one sickness (tuberculosis) that was healed during the process of two experiences (salvation and healing) by two individuals (his father and George Moncey), Roberts describes recovering from two separate issues (flu and nervous breakdown) by means of two salvation experiences by the same individuals (family prayer).

What should we make of these additions/omissions in this early account? Why would Roberts downplay a central piece of his story that would later establish him as America’s leading healing evangelist? First, this account demonstrates that Roberts learned early in his life to tailor his testimony in a way that would lend credibility to his ministry. For decades, Roberts used his story of healing from tuberculosis as a way of validating his ministry as a healing evangelist. His healing ministry was motivated by his healing testimony. As David Harrell comments, “Roberts’s view on healing depended not so much on an ideological base but on experience. Over and over he traced his passion for healing

back to the enchanted moment when he himself had experienced God's touch."¹⁷ In the same way, in order to validate his evangelistic ministry, Roberts placed the majority of his focus on how his salvation experiences were instrumental in his call as an evangelist. The way he carefully constructs his story, coupled with the impressive reports of the number of salvations in his revivals, suggests he designed his testimony in a way that would lend credibility to his ministry as an evangelist.

Another possible explanation for the differences may come from Roberts' traumatic experience of sickness within the context of a Pentecostal environment. While he was suffering with tuberculosis, Roberts testified that nearly every Sunday someone from the church or the community came to his house to pray for him, but at the same time would declare that it was God who put sickness upon him. Roberts notes that during this time, many Pentecostals not only questioned if healing was possible, they often felt it was "sacrilegious to call on God to help them individually."¹⁸ This left Roberts with feelings of bitterness and resentment towards his church. He recounts, "One Sunday afternoon, I got mad. The room was crowded with people and they were all trying to get me saved while in the same breath they were telling me God had afflicted me." Roberts finally sat up and said, "I don't believe it. I don't want to hear any more of it."¹⁹ Roberts resented the fact that during this time his faith community saw sickness as a sign of disobedience and judgment from God and he refused to validate those assumptions. Roberts' belief that God was a good God who wanted to heal people did not fully develop until nearly a decade later.

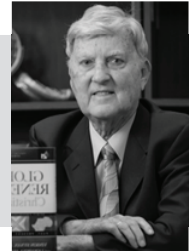
A final explanation may have to do with the nature of the illness itself. Roberts' unwillingness to divulge his illness could be due to the stigma that came with tuberculosis, especially as a Native American. Roberts had contracted tuberculosis during a time in history when the disease was associated with social problems and class distinctions.²⁰ When the diagnosis came from his doctor, Roberts expressed fear that he would be confined to a sanatorium or left to die and blamed "his mother's people" for passing that gene on to him.²¹ Although he later fully embraced his Native American heritage, it is possible that at this time he was uneasy about publically admitting this aspect of his story out of fear of how it would affect his popularity.

Whatever the reasons for this differing account, this fascinating early version of Roberts' story provides a unique summary of his early life and provides an interesting addition to what we know about this giant in American religious history.

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Notes

- 1 David E. Harrell, Jr., *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row), 43, notes that Roberts wrote articles for the *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* as early as 1937, but was not aware that he also wrote in the *East Oklahoma Conference News* (EOCN from here on).
- 2 Rayford Bullard, "Back Again," *EOCN*, September 1944, 4.
- 3 "Can Our Solider Boys Be Saved?," *EOCN*, May 1944, 2–3; "Will God Repeat the Upper Room Revival?" *EOCN*, November 1943, 1, 7; "Suggestions for the P. H. Y. S. Rallies and Young People's Work," *EOCN*, January 1944, 2–3.
- 4 *EOCN*, October 1943, 1, 7; *EOCN*, July 1944, 3.
- 5 "Former Editor Goes East," *EOCN*, August 1945, 3.
- 6 Oral Roberts, *Expect a Miracle: My Life and Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 56–57.
- 7 *EOCN*, 5 October 1939, 1.
- 8 Roberts wrote five autobiographies: Oral Roberts, *Oral Roberts' Life Story as Told by Himself* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts, 1952); Oral Roberts, *My Story* (Tulsa, OK: Summit Books Co., 1961); Oral Roberts, *My Twenty Years of a Miracles Ministry* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts, 1967); Oral Roberts, *The Call: An Autobiography* (Garden City, N.Y.:

Doubleday, 1971); Oral Roberts, *Expect a Miracle: My Life and Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

9 Roberts, *Oral Roberts' Life Story as Told by Himself*, 46.

10 Roberts, *The Call*, 34; Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 32–33; E. M. and Claudius Roberts, *Our Ministry and Our Son Oral* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts, 1960), 58–59.

11 Roberts, *Oral Roberts' Life Story as Told by Himself*, 50. Roberts testified that following Moncey's prayer, his lungs began to tingle, he saw a light above him, and he ran on the stage declaring "I am healed! I am healed! I am healed!"

12 Based on his later accounts, Roberts clearly understood the nature of his illness, having testified that his doctor and his parents told him that it was tuberculosis. Roberts, *My Story*, 16–17. Roberts knew that tuberculosis was common in Native American communities and his Cherokee mother's father and sister had died of the same illness. Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 32, also recounts that Moncey encouraged him, "An Indian boy was healed here a few nights ago." To which he commented, "I suppose that someone had told him I had Indian blood."

13 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 24.

14 "Testimonies," *The Advocate*, 11 July 1935, 14. Roberts' account of his testimony notes, "I have been bedfast for 130 days, and I praise God for it. During this time I have been saved and sanctified. I have had several doctors, medical and chiropractic, but they seem of no avail. It seems that God is the only one that knows my condition . . . I feel the call definitely, but before I recover and enter into the work I must have the abiding Comforter, the Holy Ghost, to comfort and help me to overcome my infirmities." It is unclear exactly when Roberts visited Moncey's tent meeting and was healed, but it would presumably be after this testimony. Nevertheless, this account further contradicts the 1939 testimony, which places this event in February.

15 Roberts, *The Call*, 34; Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 32–33; E. M. and Claudius Roberts, *Our Ministry and Our Son Oral*, 58–59.

16 Roberts, *Oral Roberts' Life Story as Told by Himself*, 36, says nothing of his mental state except, "During those 163 days, I never had a good day." It is also possible that he refers to this episode when he describes his mental anguish from tuberculosis in his 1952 account. He says, "I lived in a state of unreality except for the suffering in my body. My mind was in a shadow and it felt as if I was away off from normal things . . . A stupor engulfed me and at last it was as if I didn't see or hear anyone." Roberts, *The Call*, 30–31.

17 Harrell, *Oral Roberts: An American Life*, 449.

18 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 29.

19 Roberts, *Oral Roberts' Life Story as Told by Himself*, 18.

20 For example, *The American Review of Tuberculosis* 2 (1918–1919), 234, notes that tuberculosis was seen as a lower-class disease. The journal describes the fate of infected workers who miss work in order to spend months in a sanitarium, only to be barred from work when they returned because of its "consumptive" nature and "danger to his fellows."

21 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 26.

THE SPIRIT OF IMMENSE STRUGGLE

ORAL ROBERTS' NATIVE AMERICAN
ANCESTRY

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Key Words *Oral Roberts, Native American, Cherokee, Choctaw, contextualization, Pentecostalism, brush arbor*

Abstract

Oral Roberts was proud of his blended white, Cherokee, and Choctaw heritage and spoke openly about it. To understand Roberts' view of his own hybridized identity better, it is necessary to consider how his parents and grandparents negotiated the issues related to their mixed ancestry. His own view changed over time from conscious pride to overt activism on behalf of his fellow Native Americans. From the early years of the ministry, the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association engaged in a variety of creative outreaches to Native Americans where Roberts identified deeply with his brothers and sisters. Several Native American communities across the country responded positively to his work by publicly honoring Roberts in a variety of ways. During these outreaches, Roberts began his own creative exegesis that shaped his later addressing of racism during the Civil Rights era. Roberts used the words “spirit of immense struggle” to identify with the suffering his Cherokee Indian ancestors endured on the Trail of Tears.

Introduction

On a mild, late-September morning in 2009, then 91-year-old Oral Roberts made his way into Morning Star Evangelistic Center, a Native American church in the tiny town of Hectorville, Oklahoma. He told the surprised congregation, “When I entered the building, the presence of God filled my soul.”¹ Roberts had come to have a conversation with Pastor Negiel Bigpond, but at their urging, he preached what was to be his final sermon.² Prior to beginning the sermon, the congregation honored Roberts with the Warrior’s Robe, a traditional blanket they presented to people who accomplished much for the kingdom of God. Pastor Bigpond explained the reason for the robe: “It was where honor met honor. He honored us with his presence, and we honored him with the Warrior Robe.”³ Roberts spoke for more than an hour, sharing stories from his ministry and wisdom from decades of experience. After completing the sermon, he did not leave until he had laid hands on every person who asked for prayer, a tiring experience for someone of his age.⁴ While praying for people, Roberts exclaimed, “I feel like I’m back in the tent,” recalling the prayer lines from the earlier decades of his large tent revivals where he would pray for hours for those who had come seeking healing.

Oral Roberts was not looking for a place to speak that Sunday morning; many congregations would have eagerly welcomed the opportunity to host this elder statesman of the Charismatic Movement. Pastor Negiel Bigpond explained the reason for his visit. Having read Bigpond’s book, *Warrior Women*, about the role of women in ministry and Bigpond’s Native American heritage, Roberts wanted to meet Bigpond and discuss their mutual Native American ancestry. “He was proud of his blood; he kept saying ‘I’m very proud of my bloodline, my Cherokee blood,’” Bigpond said.⁵ Reflecting on the same event, Roberts’ youngest daughter, Roberta Potts, described her father as “extremely proud of his heritage as a Cherokee Indian.”⁶

While the public mostly perceived Oral Roberts as a white televangelist, he liked to emphasize that he was one-eighth Cherokee.⁷ This was a lifelong source of pride for him, which he highlighted at times when it could have been disadvantageous for him to do so. Yet,

Roberts was also proud of his Welsh roots. His navigation of these different ethnicities reveals a hybridized identity that sprang from his early experiences and his family's approaches to these issues. It was also grounded in Roberts' own creative theological reflections.

Oral Roberts' Family History

Oral Roberts told the story of the migration of his father's side of the family from Wales to Alabama, and then during Reconstruction from Alabama to central Arkansas, where they settled and built a town called Robertsville in 1871.⁸ Many Cherokee lived in central Arkansas prior to the Indian removals, and a few remained there even after the removals, primarily through intermarriage.⁹ In 1890, the Robertses and a large group of other Arkansans, including the Irwins who had intermarried with the Cherokee, headed further west, settling briefly in Texas before eventually putting down roots in southeastern Oklahoma.¹⁰ The exit of these various families from central Arkansas corresponds directly with the beginning of what Arkansas historians call the "Great Migration;" many left the state looking for more opportunities or better land.¹¹

Oral Roberts' maternal grandmother, Demaris Holton, was one-half Cherokee. Holton's family followed Native American ways of life, including maintaining a nomadic lifestyle. Demaris Holton married Frank Irwin, a white man, in spite of what was described as the "hatred of the intermarriage of whites and Indians" at the time.¹² Although the Irwin family was white, they had embraced Native American nomadic patterns; thus, Frank and Demaris Holton continued the tradition.¹³ They were among the migrants from Arkansas to Texas and eventually to Pontotoc County in southeastern Oklahoma.

Their daughter, Claudius Pricilla, also married a white man, Ellis Roberts. She soon concluded that traditional Native American ways of nomadism were not equal to the challenges of twentieth-century America.¹⁴ While embracing modernity, Claudius also treasured her Native American identity. She prayed that her soon-to-be-born son, Oral, would have blue eyes like his father (unlike his siblings who all had brown or black eyes). Yet, she also prayed that he would look like a "full blooded Indian" like her grandmother.¹⁵ She believed that God granted her request: "Oral was exactly the little blue-eyed 'full blood' I had asked for."¹⁶

Claudius Roberts passed on her love for her Native American ancestry to her children. Oral Roberts later recounted, "When I was a little boy, my mother told me, 'Son, you have Indian blood. I want you to be proud of it. Wherever you go, let people know it.'" ¹⁷ He also described in highly positive terms his interactions with Native Americans in an Oklahoma town to which he moved while a teenager: "Atoka was full of Indians, and I felt right at home. One group I could get along with was Indians. My Indian blood showed, although I am only one-eighth Indian. It was evident I was a person of color." ¹⁸ Roberts reports having grown up in a rather multicultural setting, having worked and played with white, African American, and Native American children. ¹⁹ His white ancestry appeared to be the most culturally defining for him, though he deeply prized his Native American ancestry, as did his mother.

Later when Roberts contracted tuberculosis, he appeared temporarily to resent his Native American ancestry due to his perception that the disease had been passed down to him from his mother's side of the family. He said at the time that he "blamed my mother's people for the germ they had passed on to me." ²⁰ On the night of his diagnosis, Roberts demanded that his mother tell him whether tuberculosis had claimed her father and two oldest sisters, as he had remembered; it had. ²¹ He reflected further on the number of Indians he had witnessed enduring the disease and those he had seen die from it when he accompanied his father on his preaching tours among the Indians. ²² Roberts did mention bitterness toward his ancestors as an initial reaction, but very quickly shifted blame to Satan as the source of his illness. ²³

During Roberts' courtship with Evelyn Lutman Fahnestock (later Roberts), his ancestry apparently became a brief sticking point with her parents. After meeting him for the first time, Evelyn wrote in her diary her belief that they would marry. When her mother and sister learned of her hopes, they objected noting that Oral's mother was "an Indian." Evelyn retorted that she had no intention of marrying his mother. ²⁴

A few years after this, the Robertses' first child, Rebecca Ann, was born. He admired her dark complexion and dark curly hair saying, "She looked like a little Indian." ²⁵ Roberts' delight in his daughter's Native

American appearance mirrored his mother's desire that he retain the features of their Native American ancestors.

Oral Roberts' Self-Identification as Native American

Oral Roberts' ministry began within the larger context of white, North American Pentecostalism. While early Pentecostals boasted about their racial diversity and unity in the 1910s, later Pentecostal denominations divided along racial lines.²⁶ The Pentecostal Holiness church of which Oral Roberts and his father were ministers lacked much racial diversity in the late 1940s when Oral Roberts' ministry began. There were certainly African American Pentecostal denominations like the Church of God in Christ, but that serves to prove the point: Pentecostals had segregated into racially defined groupings. This was the context in which Oral Roberts began his pastoral ministry and later his healing ministry.

Roberts did not mention his Native American ancestry in his first autobiography published in 1952, though it is not clear why. Because Roberts authored five autobiographies, it is possible to compare his various accounts of the same event across five decades. One event is recounted in similar detail in each telling—his healing from tuberculosis at a revival meeting in Ada, Oklahoma, in late July 1935.²⁷ Common to all of these accounts is something the evangelist, Reverend George Moncey, said to Roberts on that night. Moncey told him that earlier in the week, “an Indian boy with tuberculosis” had been healed instantly.²⁸ In later autobiographies, Roberts added his opinion that Moncey said this because he had probably heard about his “Cherokee Indian ancestry.”²⁹ However, in his first autobiography, while he did recount Moncey's comments, he did not relate the comment to his own Native American ethnicity as he did in subsequent accounts.

It is not clear why Roberts avoided the topic of his Native American heritage in his earliest autobiography. He may have viewed it as irrelevant to his audience. It is also possible that he was seeking to avoid being the victim of prejudice himself. This latter explanation seems less compelling in light of his subsequent handling of the topic soon after his first autobiography had been published.

Only two years later, the ministry published an article detailing how Roberts gained his middle name “Oral” through a cousin who did not originally know what the word meant. In this telling of the story, the article incidentally emphasized Roberts’ “Indian features,” his long black hair and dark skin, which were evident as a baby. It elaborated that his native ancestry was specifically Cherokee and Choctaw.³⁰ This is the earliest public acknowledgement of his Native American heritage in print. It is clear that the ministry was quite comfortable with talking about Roberts’ blended ethnicity.

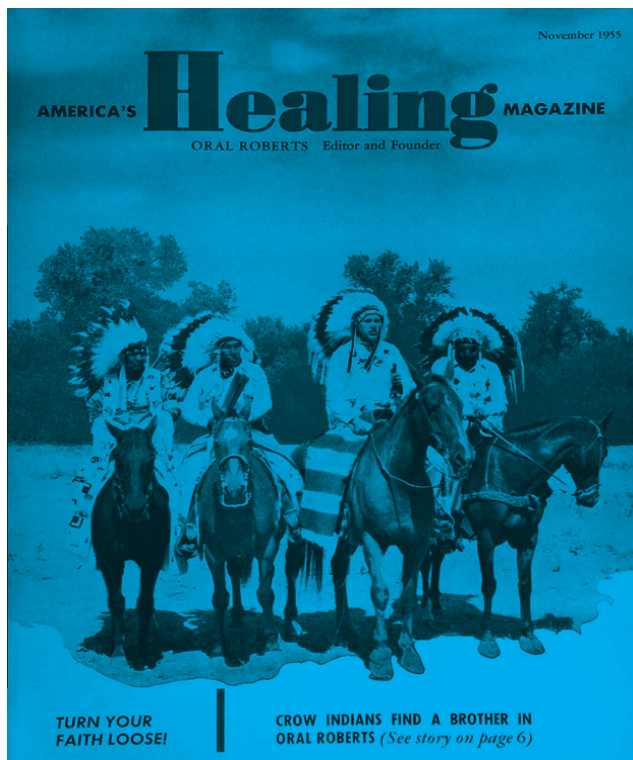
The audience for the ministry’s magazine at the time was overwhelmingly white evangelicals, many from the south. There was some risk in Roberts revealing his mixed heritage. While he might have been less aware of the risk because of his mother’s celebration of their hybridized identity, the members of his staff would have been very aware of potential drawbacks. His decision to highlight his Native American ancestry reveals the importance Roberts placed on this part of his personal history. It demonstrates well what biographer David Harrell described as Roberts’ “conscious pride in his Indian heritage.”³¹

A mere three years after publishing that first autobiography in which he did not mention his Native American ancestry at all, Roberts placed his blended heritage on center stage. The occasion was his first “all Indian” healing service near Hardin, Montana. The meeting was held at the beginning of the annual fair of the Crow Tribe in order to attract greater interest. In his introduction at the service, Roberts could not have been more forthright about his Native American identity. He offered a rather typical initial greeting to the tribe and all of those who had gathered before identifying even more deeply with them: “I bring you greetings from the Cherokee and Choctaw tribes of Oklahoma from whom I’m proud to say I descend.”³²

If Roberts had made such comments only at a meeting of fellow Native Americans, it could be argued that he was simply using his heritage as a ministry tool to appeal to a particular audience. This was not the case. A few months later, the November 1955 edition of *America’s Healing Magazine* (then the official periodical of the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association) featured the Montana meeting as the cover story with the title, “Crow Indians Find a Brother in Oral

Roberts.” The cover photograph showed Roberts seated on horseback in a traditional headdress flanked by similarly attired Crow Indians also on horseback. The article included his confident self-introduction of his Native American ancestry.

In 1960, the ministry published E. M. and Claudius Roberts’ book that was part autobiography of their own ministry and part biography



of their youngest son, Oral. Claudius spoke fondly of her Native American heritage and her desire that Oral look like a “full blooded Indian.”³³ Oral Roberts’ second autobiography, also published by the ministry in 1960, similarly spoke openly and positively about his lineage.³⁴ It is important to note that these first four accounts (1954, 1955, 1960, and 1960) predated Native American activism’s becoming mainstream in the United States. Oral Roberts mentioning his ancestry to his mostly white audience this early in his ministry offered no discernable benefits and posed more than a few potential challenges to his continued popularity. The most plausible explanation for Roberts’

public fronting of his Native American identity is the importance he and his family personally placed on it. In his final autobiography, he spoke in even greater detail about this part of his story, saying that he had “always been proud” of being a “person of color.”³⁵

In the years that followed, Roberts took an increasingly activist stand about the injustices committed against Native Americans in previous generations. In a report on the revival campaign among the Navajos in 1958, *Abundant Life* magazine described the various tribes this way: “These people live where their ancestors lived after being pushed to the fringe of civilization to eke out a livelihood on the desert wastelands.”³⁶ This mildly confrontational tone was greatly intensified in Roberts’ 1967 autobiography. There, Roberts focused attention on multiple genocides committed against native peoples by white Americans.

The history of the white man’s behavior toward the Indians is a story of broken promises, mistreatment, and hardship. Driven for the most part to arid desert lands, the Red Man was left to poverty, disease and spiritual degradation. The trail by which several tribes reached Oklahoma (which translates Red People) has gone down in history as “The Trail of Tears.” Of Indian descent myself, I have a deep compassion for the Red Man.³⁷

Roberts used this as an introduction to a description of his ministry among Native American communities, but such a tone was not essential to communicating his narrative of outreach to a culturally unique group. It was also a move that risked alienating some white donors of that time who did not view history with the same perspective of empathy and sensitivity.

As strong as this statement had been, Roberts was only beginning. In a national television special, Roberts featured an interpretive reenactment of the Trail of Tears by a group of fellow Cherokee actors and dancers. The televised drama was introduced by then Oklahoma governor David Hill, who emphasized the need to “remind Americans” of the “heartbreaking westward journey” of the Cherokee. Roberts offered this editorial in an extended description of the drama in the

ministry's national magazine: "I share in the spirit of struggle conveyed by this great drama . . . the struggle of the Cherokee people . . . for I too am Cherokee. I too have known tremendous struggle." He also took time to introduce his "little Cherokee mother" to the television audience.³⁸ This represented Roberts' strongest and most visible identification with his Native American ancestry. He used it not simply as a point of commonality with Native American audiences, but as a means to confront the comfortable world of white evangelicalism with the sins of America in hopes of provoking compassion and justice toward his own people. These moves carried potential risk, but this was a part of Roberts' history to which he was strongly committed.

Oral Roberts' Outreach to Native Americans

In the 1955 Crow Indian Reservation crusade, Roberts spoke on the topic of "The Place of the Indians in God's Program," a sermon that sought in part to validate native peoples and bring reconciliation between races. This was coupled with his desire to express salvation through the cross and the healing power of God. Roberts saw these as different aspects of the same message. The sermon was based partially on Acts 17:25–26, a passage that would later become central in his broader message of racial reconciliation.³⁹ God had created every race from "one blood," Roberts asserted; the only real differences between races, according to Acts 17, was between skin color and physical location. It was now through the "one blood" of Jesus Christ that all races could be saved, healed, and reconciled.⁴⁰ He viewed a common creation and the work of the cross as the great equalizers and unifiers in any discussion of race. Following the meeting, he was honored with a "buffalo barbecue held on the reservation."⁴¹

This was the beginning of Roberts' outreach to Native American groups across the country. Another "All-Indian Crusade" was held in Phoenix, Arizona, on February 28, 1958. Roberts preached and prayed for many Native American attendees during the one-day meeting, including 7-year-old Harold Patterson, who suffered from epileptic seizures every month. In the years preceding the service, Harold's parents, Edward and Mary Patterson, tried many things to bring relief

to their son. Various injections from the nearby clinic had not served to alleviate his condition. On six different occasions, the family turned to traditional Apache healers who employed various rituals to drive away the spirits who were believed to cause the illness. None of the rituals proved effective, though they had cost the Pattersons five head of cattle in payment to the Apache religious specialists. *Abundant Life* magazine contrasted Roberts' powerful healing meetings with the ineffective non-Christian traditional ceremonies and described these rituals in strongly negative terms.⁴²

A friend told Mary Patterson of the upcoming All-Indian Oral Roberts meeting in Phoenix, and she made plans to take her family.⁴³ Roberts prayed for little Harold and hundreds of other Native American seekers. Mrs. Patterson reported feeling "God's spirit go through my body" and was assured that her son had been healed. In early 1960, the ministry interviewed Mrs. Patterson, who reported that her son had not had any further seizures in the two-year period since Roberts prayed for him.⁴⁴

In another part of this ministry's outreach to Native Americans, they launched a literature distribution campaign in 1957 in Sheridan, Wyoming, and Gallup, New Mexico. The initiatives were synchronized with large regional festivals in an effort to reach as many tribes at one time as possible.⁴⁵ The attention paid to Native Americans in this region did not go unnoticed. The Navajo Tribal Council headquartered in Window Rock, Arizona (not far from Gallup, New Mexico), invited Oral Roberts to hold an all-Indian crusade in 1959.⁴⁶ The previous literature campaigns in the area laid the groundwork for this unique invitation. Reports in the ministry's magazine about the meeting listed nearly a dozen tribes present at the meeting—Blackfeet, Shoshones, Apaches, Pimas, Papagos, Mericopas, Hopis, Zunis, San Domingos, Utes, and Navajos—and again highlighted Roberts' own Native American heritage for the national audience. Hilliard Griffin, the director of Indian outreach for the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, described Roberts' preaching during those meetings as uniquely enthusiastic: "I have heard him preach many times . . . but this far exceeded the great moments of the past as Oral Roberts ministered with a heart of understanding and love to

these needy Indians.” He went on to recount numerous miraculous healings of deafness, paralysis, and other illnesses.⁴⁷

The Appeal of Oral Roberts and Pentecostalism to Native Americans

Pentecostal Christianity has spread among people living in traditional religious contexts worldwide as the result of a kind of accidental contextualization. Contextualization is the process of adapting arts, ceremonies, and concepts from a host community to communicate the gospel in culturally appropriate ways. This process often looks for points of commonality between host community forms and concepts and the Christian faith as ways to form links to convey scriptural truth. Pentecostal ministers and missionaries, Oral Roberts included, apparently made only limited attempts to contextualize their message or methods for various audiences. Roberts often talked about how God had not forgotten Native American communities in an effort to make the message more relatable.⁴⁸ The spread of Pentecostalism and Roberts’ success in traditional religious contexts, including Native American societies, is due to what might be called unintentional contextualization. Neither Roberts nor Pentecostals intentionally sought to contextualize local arts, ceremonies, or concepts in an effort to communicate with their audiences. Nevertheless, Pentecostals, including Roberts (like many other Pentecostals), preached a message and practiced a spirituality that proved highly relevant to people from folk religious traditions. Emphases on the spiritual gifts, stylized preaching, and lively worship distinguished Roberts’ meetings (as well as other Pentecostal outreaches) from other Christian groups. These unique emphases also made Pentecostals like Roberts more relatable to Native American audiences who often valued similar religious expressions.

Sacred Healing in Pentecostal and Native American Traditions

Historian Cecil Roebeck notes that Native Americans, along with many other ethnicities, were present at the Azusa Street revival that spawned

global Pentecostalism.⁴⁹ Indeed, the spread of Pentecostal Christianity in traditional religious contexts is a well-studied phenomenon; it is no surprise, then, that it has been attractive to some Native American audiences. Native American spirituality has long emphasized physical healing as central to their belief systems, but many Christian traditions have not historically emphasized divine healing. More broadly, missiologist Paul Hiebert described how Christian traditions that have deemphasized the supernatural have failed to address the issues that are of the highest relevance to people from traditional religious backgrounds.⁵⁰ Historian William McLoughlin identified “the three great stumbling blocks” of Christianity for Native Americans: “its failure to address the basic issues of corporate harmony, bountiful harvests, and sacred healing.”⁵¹ Pentecostalism in general, and Oral Roberts in particular, offered a profound emphasis on divine healing as an integral part of gospel presentations. Native American historian Angela Tarango notes that while Pentecostals⁵² were not the first to teach about divine healing, “they heavily emphasized its embodied, miraculous form and made it a centerpiece of their belief.”⁵³ Native American psychologist Joseph P. Gone goes so far as to identify Oral Roberts as one of the two⁵⁴ most renowned Native American healers of the twentieth century.⁵⁵

This is not to say that Roberts made any deliberate attempt to incorporate Native American forms into his presentation or theology; his contextualization was unintended. Rather, Native American listeners likely saw points of connection between the emphasis on healing within their own traditions and the healing ministry of Oral Roberts. By all accounts, Roberts’ ideas were shaped primarily by his Pentecostal roots and his own personal study of Scripture as illuminated by the Holy Spirit. However, Native American listeners would have encountered something not entirely unfamiliar when they heard and saw Roberts’ ministry. Chief W. W. Keeler of the Cherokee Nation described Roberts’ teachings about the “whole man” and God listening to people as similar to several Cherokee concepts.⁵⁶ Such points of continuity between Native American spirituality and Pentecostalism have served to lower the sense of the foreignness of Christianity. Oral Roberts’ emphasis on his own Cherokee and Choctaw heritage would likely have only strengthened this.

Sacred Speech and Sacred Singing

As a part of healing and spirituality, Native American traditions often emphasize the spoken word and singing. In Navajo spirituality, for example, ritualized singing is believed to be the mechanism through which healing occurs.⁵⁷ Oral Roberts' preaching, and that of other traditional Pentecostal ministers, may have been viewed as a kind of ritualized speech form. Roberts' own theology emphasized that his sermons were not simply prepared speeches but anointed messages from God. Tarango observed that the "loud, boisterous music, singing, and ecstatic dance" were forms that marked both Native American traditional religion and Pentecostalism.⁵⁸ Once again, the enthusiasm in Roberts' meetings would likely have felt more natural to Native American audiences than did other forms of Christianity.

Native American Architecture in American Revivalism

One of the great ironies of American religious history is the association of the brush arbor with American revivalism. Native Americans across the United States traditionally used brush arbors for both sacred and secular use for centuries prior to the adoption of the structure for Christian use.⁵⁹ The style of brush arbors used by American revivalists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was borrowed from Native American tribes in the southeastern United States.⁶⁰ This form was first borrowed by the "invisible institution" of independent African American churches, with non-Christian Native Americans sometimes aiding in the construction of the brush arbors for the Christian worshipers. The Second Great Awakening similarly utilized the brush arbor for revivals conducted by itinerant preachers.⁶¹

Pentecostal evangelists made great use of brush arbors on the revival circuit. Having been saved in a brush arbor meeting himself, Oral Roberts' father, Ellis Roberts, relied on quickly constructed brush arbors for the revival meetings he held across southeastern Oklahoma.⁶² Oral Roberts specifically identified Native Americans as part of the audience,⁶³ speaking of his father's "preaching tours among the Indian people."⁶⁴ There was almost certainly not an intentional effort by

Roberts' father to use a Native American structure in order to identify better with his audience. By the time Ellis Roberts was constructing them, brush arbors had become synonymous with evangelical revivalism and Pentecostalism in particular. Thus, Ellis Roberts and other Pentecostals probably did not associate the structure with Native Americans at all, and if they did, they probably saw them as being strictly pragmatic.

If the elder Roberts did not recognize the connection, his wife, Claudius, or Native American neighbors might have pointed it out. Whatever the case, the connection would have likely been more apparent to Native American audiences than it would have been for Pentecostal evangelists like Ellis Roberts. Because Native Americans continued to use brush arbors for ceremonial purposes, they could possibly have seen a Pentecostal religious service set in a brush arbor as natural and familiar. It could have very possibly created positive associations that made it more likely for Native Americans to participate. Oral Roberts may have even seen tent revivals as an extension of the brush arbor revivals he had witnessed as a child.

Early American Pentecostalism and Oral Roberts' ministry retained multiple features that would have potentially held appeal for Native American audiences. The emphasis on charismatic gifts (especially healing), the use of stylized speech and enthusiastic singing, and the early use of Native American brush arbors very likely created some small sense of familiarity among some Native American audiences. These form a kind of unintentional contextualization that is common to Pentecostal and Charismatic missions. Pentecostals and Charismatics like Roberts did not intentionally seek points of commonality with their audiences. Instead, they emphasized things that happened to be highly relevant to traditional religious groups globally, including Native American communities.

Questioning Oral Roberts' Native American Heritage

Native American psychologist Joseph P. Gone questioned Oral Roberts' Native American ancestry based on reports that the Cherokee Nation rolls did not maintain any record of Roberts or his ancestors. In the

end, Gone does acknowledge that there are other evidences that do support Roberts' self-description as a Native American, though he does suggest that there is a question based on the Cherokee rolls.⁶⁵ It is not clear which members of Roberts' family were researched in the rolls. Claudius Roberts⁶⁶ described her grandmother as a "full-blooded Indian,"⁶⁷ but this grandmother's maiden name is not reported in any of Roberts' autobiographies, though we do know that her married name was Holton. As a result, it may not have been possible for Gone or others to research her ancestry thoroughly due to the Roberts family's not detailing their genealogy more thoroughly. Roberts' great-grandmother was from Arkansas and may or may not have avoided the Indian removals through intermarriage to a white man, though it is unlikely that that was their primary motivation for marriage.

Fortunately, there are several other verifications of Oral Roberts' Native American heritage, some of which Gone acknowledged and others to which he likely did not have access during his research. The annual American Indian Exposition in Anadarko, Oklahoma, has historically been one of the largest gatherings of Native Americans in the country. In 1963, they selected Oral Roberts to receive the honor of Outstanding American Indian of the Year.⁶⁸ Gone mentions this honor as bolstering the case of Roberts' Native American ancestry.⁶⁹

The leader of the exposition, President Kharghar, said the following in honor of Roberts:

We appreciate your Indian descent, Reverend Roberts.
We honor you as an Indian. We are a minority group, but
through you we have gained prestige in the world. We thank
you. We know that you are a man of God. And we share the
blessings that go with you. Because of you, I know that the
minds of the people are thinking about God—if only for
this day.⁷⁰

The honor recognized Roberts' Native American ancestry but also seemed comfortable with his blended heritage. Roberts himself seemed to grapple with the ambiguity of his hybridized identity during the event. Roberts described that during his childhood, his "father preached to the Indian people all around here." This sort of sociolinguistic construction appears to orient Roberts as an outsider to the Indians that he worked

with in the cotton fields and met during his father's evangelistic meetings.

Later that same day, while formally receiving the honor, Roberts said the following, which reveals a closer identification with his Native American identity: "Wherever I have gone, this Indian heritage has been a blessing. It has been a great help to me to know that I'm Indian. It makes me love all people."⁷¹ The article further described Roberts as "at home with his Indian brothers." Using this language of identification, calling himself an Indian—rather than a descendant of Indians or one who related well with Indians—indicates a deliberate shift in the way Roberts described himself. It appears that after receiving this award, Roberts was more likely to identify himself simply as a Cherokee Indian rather than as one with some percentage of Cherokee blood. In his 1972 television special, he calls himself a Cherokee rather than descended from the Cherokees, as he had previously.⁷²

Roberts always celebrated his Native American ancestry, as he had been instructed by his mother to do. Yet, he was also comfortable with his hybridity. Many Native Americans in Oklahoma and elsewhere embraced Roberts as one of their community. The 1972 Oral Roberts prime time television special, which included the "Trail of Tears" drama staged by actors from the Cherokee Heritage Center, served to raise the profile of the Cherokee Heritage Center and their regular performances of the play in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Later during the program, the Principal Chief of the Cherokees presented Roberts with a citation from the Cherokee Nation.⁷³

This citation is important because it is an official written acknowledgement by the Cherokee Nation of Roberts' Cherokee ancestry and his contributions to the Cherokee people. Gone does not report the citation in his discussion of Roberts' Native American ancestry, but it is unlikely that he could have gotten access to this information through reasonable efforts. While the presentation of the citation was broadcast nationwide to 416 stations on a primetime network television special in 1972,⁷⁴ and it was reported in the *Abundant Life* magazine,⁷⁵ it was not widely reported in the press. Unless he happened to have watched that broadcast, it would have been very difficult for Gone to have been aware of Roberts' having received this honor. The citation itself is on display in a museum on the campus of Oral Roberts University. There are few ways

that any researcher could have been aware of this citation without going to this museum or doing extensive archival research. This is more a failure on the part of the Oral Roberts museum for not making this information more widely known to the public.

These official honors from Native American institutions are important. Roberts was invited by the Navajo Tribal Council to hold a crusade in eastern Arizona in 1959, an honor not accorded to any other Christian minister. The American Indian Exposition recognized Roberts as “Outstanding American Indian of 1963,” illustrating broad support for Roberts from within the Native American community. The Cherokee Nation’s honoring of Roberts with a citation of the Cherokee Nation in 1972 indicates their official written acknowledgement of his Cherokee ancestry. In a 1983 article describing Roberts’ Cherokee heritage, *The Saturday Evening Post* reported that he was on the board of trustees for the Cherokee Foundation.⁷⁶ Taken together, these honors indicate the degree to which many Native Americans recognized and honored Oral Roberts’ Cherokee and Choctaw ancestry.

It is also necessary to revisit Roberts’ own self-identification as a Native American. His public description of himself as being of Cherokee and Choctaw descent began at a time (1954)⁷⁷ when it offered no discernable advantage for him describe himself in those terms. It long predated positive shifts toward Native Americans in popular culture and posed some risk with his mostly white audience of the time. Roberts’ claim was rooted in his deeply held pride in his Native American heritage, even though he was aware that publicizing it could have had negative consequences for his popularity.

Conclusion

Oral Roberts prized his Native American heritage and celebrated it on many occasions when it could have done little to further his cause and could have easily proven disadvantageous for him. Leveraging his hybridized identity, he later confronted evangelicals with the sins of white America against Native Americans and spoke more generally against the injustices of segregation and racism. Yet, he did this without bitterness or rancor; Roberts was an exceptionally positive individual. He valued highly his ministry’s outreach to Native American communities. Native American communities reciprocated

with multiple honors in recognition of Roberts and his advocacy on behalf of Native Americans.

The continuing relevance of Roberts' ministry and message should not be overlooked. His creative reading of Acts 17:25–26 suggests that people can celebrate their identities (especially in a world where hybridity is often a given) and yet advocate for unity. For Roberts, unity and reconciliation were found through common blood: all of humanity descended from common ancestry, and we are all reconciled to one another and to God through the one blood of Jesus Christ's sacrifice. Roberts was able to negotiate a positive recognition of his Native American heritage and to promote peace and forgiveness between groups.

Finally, Oral Roberts' spirituality is one that connected with Native Americans. His emphasis on dreams, visions, prophecy, the word of knowledge, and healing all tended to resonate with those from Native American religious traditions. The enthusiastic preaching and singing also felt more authentic to many Native American listeners than other more sedate forms of Christian expression. Roberts' Spirit-based positivism and his focus on divine resources to meet legitimate needs continue to offer useful conceptualizations that can serve to empower minority communities everywhere. Oral Roberts' message carries continuing relevance because of its important and creative contribution to the Native American community and to the continuing conversation on race relations.



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Notes

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- 4 Roberta Roberts Potts, *My Dad, Oral Roberts* (Noble, OK: Icon Publishing Group, 2011), 285.
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- 28 Oral Roberts, *Oral Roberts' Life Story as Told by Himself* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts Ministries, 1952), 49.

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- 30 G. H. Montgomery, "She Named Him Oral . . .," *America's Healing Magazine*, February 1954, 6.
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- 34 Roberts, *My Story*, 34.
- 35 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 20.
- 36 Hilliard Griffin, "Missionary to the American Indian," *Abundant Life*, November 1959, 8.
- 37 Oral Roberts, *My Personal Diary of Our Worldwide Ministry* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts Ministries, 1967), 46.
- 38 "Oral Roberts on Campus," *Abundant Life Magazine*, December 1972, 3, 8.
- 39 Roberts made strong stands against racism and segregation during the Civil Rights movement when it was not popular to do so and faced several death threats as a result (Oral Roberts, *The Call* [Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1972], 99–104). He leveraged his Native American ancestry to speak prophetically about racism, stating boldly, "I'm Indian. I'm neither black nor white." (Potts, *My Dad, Oral Roberts*, 55.) In his discussion of the topic in his 1995 autobiography, *Expect a Miracle*, 136, he once again referenced Acts 17:26 like he had among the Crow as an argument against racial discrimination and injustice.
- 40 Montgomery, "Deliverance Is Brought to Crow Indian Reservation," 6.
- 41 "Indian Tribes Honor Oral Roberts," *Billings Gazette*, 27 August 1955, 6.
- 42 E. E. Cox, "Tribe Stirred by Apache Boy's Healing," *Abundant Life*, March 1960, 6.
- 43 In the months just prior to the Oral Roberts meeting in Phoenix, Mary Patterson had embraced the Christian faith through the witness of the missionary Pearl Foster. After receiving the Holy Spirit, she claimed to have a growing assurance that God would heal her son. She felt a particularly strong impression that if she took him to the Roberts meeting, he would be miraculously cured.
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- 48 Montgomery, "Deliverance Is Brought to Crow Indian Reservation," 5.
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50 Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Publishing, 1994), 189–202. The title of the chapter is “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle.”

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52 Tarango wonderfully describes Pentecostalism among Native Americans in “Jesus as the Great Physician: Pentecostal Native North Americans within the Assemblies of God and New Understandings of Pentecostal Healing,” in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, ed. Candy Gunther Brown (Oxford University Press, 2011), and in *Choosing the Jesus Way: American Indian Pentecostals and the Fight for the Indigenous Principle* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), but she neglects to make any mention of Oral Roberts. Tarango’s study is primarily focused on the Assemblies’ of God work among the Navajo in Arizona, so that likely accounts for her omission of Roberts. However, Roberts held a crusade in Window Rock, Arizona, in 1959 at the invitation of the Navajo Tribal Council. This event certainly had some influence on the view of Pentecostalism among the Navajo community and was contemporary with other events about which Tarango reported. There is a great need for scholars of Native American Pentecostalism to consider Oral Roberts’ contribution. Roberts is the most notable Native American Pentecostal in the twentieth century, and his influence among the Native American community has not yet been thoroughly studied.

53 Tarango, “Jesus as the Great Physician,” 108.

54 The other “most renowned Native American healer of the 20th century,” according to Gone, was the Lakota holy man, Black Elk, who converted to Roman Catholicism in mid-life, repented of his indigenous ceremonial practices, and led many other Native Americans to Christianity.

55 Joseph P. Gone, “Indigenous Healing Past and Present: Exploding Persistent Binaries,” in *Indigenous Cultures and Mental Health Counselling: Four Directions for Integration with Counselling Psychology*, ed. Suzanne Stewart, Roy Moodley, and Ashely Hyatt (New York: Routledge, 2016), viii.

56 W. W. Keeler, *Citation of the Cherokee Nation: Our Father’s Hand*, 1972.

57 James F. Downs, *The Navajo* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 101–2.

58 Tarango, “Jesus as the Great Physician,” 108.

59 Daniel C. Swan, “Architecture, American Indian,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, n.d., n.p., <http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=AR007> (22 June 2018).

60 Robert Easton and Peter Nabakov, *Native American Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 425.

61 Patrick Neal Mingos, *Slavery in the Cherokee Nation: The Keetoowah Society and the Defining of a People, 1855–1867* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 41.

62 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 10–11.

63 Armstrong, “A Contribution to His People,” 22.

- 64 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 24, 136.
- 65 Gone, "Indigenous Healing Past and Present," xi–xii.
- 66 Gone further notes that in U.S. census records the members of Oral Roberts' immediate family self-identified as "white," including his mother Claudius Pricilla Irwin Roberts, who elsewhere described herself as one-quarter Cherokee. Her self-identification as "white" on census records may have been the result of census rules on a particular year or instructions given by census workers and is therefore not a reliable indicator.
- 67 E. M. Roberts and Claudius Roberts, *Our Ministry and Our Son Oral*, 33.
- 68 This article seems to indicate that Oral Roberts' "All-Indian crusades" were more numerous than are reported in the ministry's magazines. This stands in contrast to biographer David Harrell's claim that "the organization never formulated a substantial 'outreach' to Native Americans (Harrell, *Oral Roberts: An American Life*, 135.). Further research into the listing of crusades would prove helpful. Also, there were numerous crusades where significant Native American populations were present but where an "All-Indian" night or crusade may have been impractical (see Roberts, *My Personal Diary of Our Worldwide Ministry*, 46). Specific outreaches to proximate Native American groups may have taken place. Such outreach would have almost certainly not been classified as an "All-Indian" effort but would have constituted a significant effort to make meaningful contact with these communities.
- 69 Gone, "Indigenous Healing Past and Present," xi–xii.
- 70 Armstrong, "A Contribution to His People," 22.
- 71 Armstrong, "A Contribution to His People," 23.
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- 76 Glen V. McIntyre, "Oral Roberts and the Cherokee Heritage," *Saturday Evening Post*, July/August 1983, 88.
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ORAL ROBERTS AND THE HEBREW BIBLE

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Abstract

Oral Roberts held a favorable view of Jewish people and viewed the restoration of the state of Israel as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. This article recounts a key facet of the Jewish outreach of the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, the Hebrew Bible project. In collaboration with Myron Sackett, Oral Roberts sponsored the publication of a Hebrew Bible (Old and New Testaments) and distributed it in Israel and other countries. Roberts was motivated by a desire to play a major role in the conversion of the Jewish people in the last days. By means of exhaustive research of relevant source material housed in the Holy Spirit Research Center at Oral Roberts University, interviews with ORU professors, and relevant scholarly research and publications, the authors reconstructed the story of the Hebrew Bible project, analyzed the motivating factors that propelled it, and assessed the significance of dispensational accents in the eschatology of Oral Roberts.

Introduction

This article will recount a story known by relatively few in the Oral Roberts University (ORU) community.¹ The Hebrew Bible project was a key component of Oral Roberts' global vision. Of the seven world outreaches Roberts announced in 1955, he prioritized "a special work among the Jewish people."² The Jewish people and land of Israel had a treasured place in the heart of Oral Roberts. Between 1954 and 1969, he made five trips to Israel, filming holy sites, offering biblical commentary, and ministering with the World Action singers and gospel teams of Oral Roberts University.³ Roberts sponsored the distribution of over 100,000 Hebrew Bibles published by Evangeliiipress of Orebro, Sweden, under the aegis of the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association (OREA). In one instance, Oral and Evelyn Roberts presented a copy of the Hebrew Bible to former Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion. Roberts not only distributed Hebrew Bibles in Israel, but also had copper trunks with these Bibles buried in the caves of Petra and remote locations in Israel. Roberts' reasoning for burying the Bibles will be related below as we tell the story of the Hebrew Bible project and explain its relation to Roberts' trips to Israel and his views on eschatology.⁴

A close reading of Oral Roberts' early writings clearly shows that Israel had a special place in his heart. As with many evangelicals and Pentecostals of his day, Roberts attributed prime significance to the restoration of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In his famous "Fourth Man" sermon, Roberts asks, "Did you know that an entire nation is on the move across the face of the earth right now? Did you know that the Jews are returning to Palestine in unprecedented numbers?" He went on to say, "The Jews are returning in unbelief. They may not know it yet but they are returning according to God's timetable." For Roberts, "This is the first preliminary: the returning of the Jews. An unseen force is pulling them back to their ancestral home."⁵ One might ask if Oral Roberts could be considered a Christian Zionist. In his meticulous work, *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, Donald Lewis defines Christian Zionism as "the belief that the Jewish people were destined by God to have a national homeland in Palestine and that Christians were obliged

to use means to enable this to take place.”⁶ Based on the evidence presented below, we will let our readers decide for themselves if Oral Roberts can be classified as a Christian Zionist.

Hebrew Bible Project

Oral Roberts was predisposed to the Hebrew Bible project by his love for the Jews. Early in his adult life he sensed a call to ministry with Jewish people. He recalls, “I knew it in the fall of 1938 when I was just turning 21. At this time, I was in Texas to propose to Evelyn. There was something I had to tell her, but I didn’t know how to begin. The Lord has told me that someday I was to be a missionary to the Jews . . .”⁷ In his “Second Call to Action” of 1955 Roberts announced, “We are to do a special work among the Jewish people. I feel deeply that God is going to visit his ancient people soon, and that we are to have a definite part in this. This call has been on my life ever since God saved me and it must be fulfilled.”⁸ He continued, sizing up the importance of the Jewish outreach, “Now the biggest thing is the Jewish project. This is the big one. We feel the success of or failure of our ministry hinges on the Jewish work.” He announced, “We are going to print the Bible in Hebrew We are going to distribute the Bible among the Jews of the world, but principally in Israel. Dr. Myron Sackett has just joined forces with us. Brother Lester Sumrall is going to set up our national headquarter in Jerusalem. He’s going there to get workers and get these Bibles out. He’s going to preach and prepare the way for me to go in person to hold a meeting.” Roberts then went on to pinpoint his prime motivation, averring, “People, if you will bless the Jews, God will bless you. But if you curse them, you will be cursed. The Bible says it. History proves it. They are a wonderful people and I love them. I love them and make no apology for it.”⁹

The attitude Roberts espoused is known as philo-Semitism (love for the Jewish people), the opposite of anti-Semitism (hatred of Jewish people). Roberts was keenly aware that many Jews did not trust Christians due to Christian anti-Semitism and the Nazi Holocaust. They remember how Germany, a Christian nation, put so many of them death, concluding that this is evidence that “the Christians are

really Jew-killers.” Roberts countered by pointing out that during the Holocaust there were “Christian people who hid the Jews from the Germans. Corrie ten Boom, one of the great Christians of all time, hid Jews in her native land, Holland. Corrie ten Boom is just one of thousands of Christians who did this. All over the world today there are so-called Christians who hate the Jews and there are Christians who love the Jews. The Jews are caught in the middle.”¹⁰ Out of love for the Jewish people, Roberts opposed the longstanding supersessionist claim that the Church had replaced Israel as God’s chosen people. “God made His covenant with them and someday they will come back to that covenant, because God’s gifts and God’s callings are never recalled.”¹¹ He insisted that “God has not cast away his ancient people, rather He is preparing their hearts for the mass acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah at His second advent. The Jews will then believe in Jesus of Nazareth, the only way to salvation for Jew and Gentile alike.”¹² In the interest of evangelizing the Jewish people, Oral Roberts embraced the Hebrew Bible project.

Distribution of the Hebrew Bible in Israel did not originate with Oral Roberts. During the nineteenth century biblical scholars associated with the Christian mission to the Jews translated the Greek New Testament into Hebrew.¹³ The origins of Roberts’ Hebrew Bible project can be traced back to Florentius Hallzon (1886–1969), owner of *Evangelii*press in Orebro, Sweden, and publisher of *Hemmets Van*, a widely read Christian newspaper in Scandinavia. Hallzon contributed large sums to fund Jewish immigration to Israel and subsidized the publication of a Hebrew version of the Bible, Old and New Testaments, for distribution by mission organizations. The British and Foreign Bible Society in London also published Hebrew Bibles, but was not able to meet the growing demand after the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. Hallzon’s *Evangelii*press met that need by printing 55,000 Hebrew Bibles in 1953 to be distributed for free in Israel.¹⁴ The primary contact for Hallzon in Israel was a Finnish Pentecostal, Kaarlo Syvanto, located in Tiberias. Syvanto obtained Hebrew Bibles from *Evangelii*press and in 1956 started giving them to Israeli public schools. During his forty years in Israel Syvanto was credited with distributing over 400,000 Hebrew Bibles. It was Syvanto who suggested to Myron

Sackett that he make an arrangement to procure Hebrew Bibles from Evangeliipress. Hallzon was glad to do so at a cost of two dollars apiece. Thus began the Hebrew Bible project, led by Sackett under the aegis of OREA.¹⁶

Myron Sackett, a close associate of Aimee Semple McPherson, superintendent of the International Foursquare Church, and founder of Christian Friends of Israel, joined the staff of OREA on April 1, 1954,¹⁷ serving until his death in August 1967.¹⁸ Oral Roberts had only a vague understanding of his call to minister to the Jewish people until he met Sackett and realized what could be done by OREA to fulfill that call.¹⁹ The first interaction between Oral Roberts and Myron Sackett occurred in 1953 when Mae Sackett, Myron's wife, received healing at an Oral Roberts Crusade in Sacramento, California.²⁰ A personal meeting was arranged through the mutual friendship of Bob DeWeese, Roberts' associate evangelist and Sackett's peer from Bible college.²¹ Moreover, Myron Sackett's ministry to the Jews began well before becoming involved with OREA. In 1945, he spoke with a Messianic Jew who believed that God had called Sackett to a ministry of Jewish evangelism. Subsequently Sackett received a "vision and burden for the salvation of the Jewish people."²² He then visited the land of Israel with some regularity. During his first visit to the newly formed state of Israel in 1949, Sackett's burden for Jewish evangelism increased measurably. As he walked the streets of Haifa, it "seemed almost to crush [him] to [his] knees."²³ After this experience, as Sackett was praying in his hotel room, he heard an audible voice saying, "Give my people my Word (the Bible) both Old and New Testaments printed in Hebrew."²⁴ Sackett was convinced that Bible distribution would be the most effective method of reaching the Jewish people with the Christian message. He promptly "organized the 'Christian Friends of Israel' in an effort to interest as many people as I could in a Hebrew Bible program for Israel."²⁵ Through this organization Sackett promoted his evangelistic ministry and published a magazine called *Christian Friends of Israel Messenger* after the merger with OREA.²⁶ Sackett discussed joining his ministry with Oral Roberts as soon as he discovered that Roberts also had a passion for the Jewish people. His affiliation with OREA was confirmed in a dream that "was so real I knew it was the Lord telling me to join

forces with Brother Roberts to take the gospel to the Jewish people and abundant life to the peoples of the world.”²⁷ In this dream Sackett saw himself driving his small car up into a large bus that Roberts was driving.²⁷ On April 1, 1954,²⁹ Myron Sackett officially “consolidated Christian Friends of Israel, Inc., with Healing Waters, Inc.”³⁰

Sackett was convinced that joining OREA had greatly increased his ability to reach the Jewish people. He stated, “Now, instead of reaching hundreds of people with this message of Jewish evangelism, I am reaching thousands. Instead of reaching scores of Jewish people with the gospel message, I am reaching hundreds.”³¹ Sackett recalled that he went from distributing hundreds of Hebrew Bibles to thousands, with so many requests coming in for Hebrew Bibles that “the regular printing houses could not supply Bibles fast enough to meet our needs.” Consequently, Sackett arranged for Evangelii Press in Orebro, Sweden, to be in charge of printing Bibles for distribution by OREA.³² As a result, many Jewish people received Hebrew Bibles and asked for follow-up from OREA. Sackett wrote, “When I tell them that I am working with Oral Roberts, the door is usually opened immediately, for they have seen him on television. They are interested and want to know more about this ministry.”³³ Although partnering with Oral Roberts undoubtedly helped Sackett reach more people with his message, his bold and tenacious efforts also deserve credit, as he stopped frequently “in the course of his travels for the Oral Roberts ministry” to “testify to the Jews” wherever he could.³⁴

Sackett served the Jewish outreach of OREA in many ways. He was responsible for the printing and placement of “more than one hundred thousand copies of the entire Bible in the Hebrew language throughout Israel and other nations where Jewish people were interested in having both Old and New Testaments.”³⁵ Oral Roberts himself estimated that OREA had placed “more than 150,000 Hebrew Bibles in Israel and the nations of the world.”³⁶ However, the goal that Oral Roberts and Myron Sackett originally set of distributing 500,000 Hebrew Bibles in Israel alone³⁷ was never reached. Sackett met with rabbis and Jewish leaders frequently on behalf of OREA.³⁸ Sackett was also Roberts’ personal guide for several of his trips to Israel, beginning in December 1953.³⁹ He also frequently wrote articles for OREA magazines, aggressively

promoted the Jewish outreach on his worldwide travels, and reported on Roberts' healing crusades and trips to Israel.

The Jewish outreach, including the Hebrew Bible project, was fourth on the list of OREA World Outreaches.⁴⁰ Oral Roberts himself heavily promoted the distribution of the Hebrew Bible, "asking his partners to give to sponsor a radio or television program, to buy a piece of essential equipment, or to provide Bibles for Jewish families."⁴¹ Hebrew Bibles were distributed free of charge to any who requested them, and thus they had a wide reach. Roberts recounted missionaries saying to him, "Brother Roberts, your Bibles are the only Bibles we can get to give out free. We got a few dozen to sell, but the people will not buy them."⁴² While this may have been indicative of a degree of apathy towards purchasing the Scriptures, Roberts viewed it as a "thrill" and a "challenge" that the outreach could increase interest in the Bible among the Jewish people.⁴³ The Hebrew Bibles were placed "as textbooks in Israeli schools" at the requests of administrators to be used for teaching Hebrew.⁴⁴ Not only was the Hebrew Bible used within Israeli schools, but supposedly it could also be used by "other Jews over the world" to learn Hebrew.⁴⁵ According to Roberts, the Hebrew Bibles were "printed in the pure Hebrew language and as such are welcomed by the Jews as reading and study material," to the extent that Roberts saw them "wherever" he went in the land of Israel.⁴⁶ When Sackett was in South America, he met many Jewish people who "all want to go home to Israel," and Sackett and his team prayed for them and gave them "Hebrew Bibles to take with them" to Israel.⁴⁷ They were given as gifts to Jewish leaders and rabbis. However, regardless of whether Jewish recipients requested a Hebrew Bible or it was given without prior request, Sackett was "sure that God has another reason for the Jewish people's reading the Bibles," and he operated on the assumption that "We put the Bible in their hands; they read it; the Holy Spirit does the work."⁴⁸ When OREA's Hebrew Bible was utilized in schools, the Old Testament was taught "in the rabbinical manner," but since there was no rabbinical method for the New Testament, everyone "read the New Testament together. Then everyone believes about it what he desires to believe."⁴⁹ Oral Roberts and Myron Sackett were particularly encouraged to discover that

Israeli students were “permitted to take their Bibles with them” after graduation, ostensibly having a lifelong effect.⁵⁰

Sackett’s death in August of 1967 prompted Oral Roberts to recount all that his friend had done for the Jewish people and the ministries of OREA. He was reminded of how “deeply moved” Sackett was at the founding of ORU, saying “he saw the potential of the University in the light of what the graduating students could do to further the Jewish Outreach and all of our outreaches.”⁵¹ On his next visit to Israel with ORU students, Roberts cherished memories of Sackett, stating, “Without the 15 years during which Dr. Myron Sackett and I worked in this land, beginning with the government leaders, the students could not have had this open door.”⁵² He shuddered at Sackett’s “foreboding” statement that his trip in the summer of 1966 “may be my last trip to Israel,” as it was.⁵³ Finally, Roberts asserted that he would “accelerate” the Hebrew Bible ministry and “head up the Jewish Outreach” himself, hoping that he would “return to Israel next summer to explore new ways for reaching the Jewish people with the Gospel.”⁵⁴ There is little mention of Sackett in OREA magazines or Roberts’ books after this article, and there is scant mention of the Hebrew Bible project. Roberts asserted, “We are continuing our ministry in Israel and it is beginning to get before the people.”⁵⁵ Sackett’s wife, Mae, continued to work with OREA, being a prayer partner for the Abundant Life Prayer Group.⁵⁶ Roberts believed that Myron Sackett was “looking down from Heaven” at both the “Hebrew ministry and the Abundant Life Prayer Group.”⁵⁷

As to the success of the Jewish outreach, Harrell concludes that “the objectives of Oral Roberts’ Israel outreach remained quite limited and only minimally successful.”⁵⁸ The impact of the Hebrew Bible project is difficult to ascertain. Longstanding ORU faculty members still have copies of the Hebrew Bible in their possession. When asked if they could confirm that the Hebrew Bible published by ORU was in fact placed in caves in Petra and remote locations in Israel or that these Bibles were located by anyone, they answered in the negative. Hence, the significance of the Hebrew Bible project probably pertains to the publicity it afforded to Oral Roberts and the mission of ORU and OREA. It is likely that the Jewish outreach resonated with evangelical

Christians worldwide who embraced pro-Israel sentiments, thereby raising the stature of Oral Roberts and his ministries. One could argue that Oral Roberts made a contribution to the growth of Christian Zionism worldwide. Given the global reach of Roberts' crusades, television and radio broadcasts, tape ministry, and publications, through which he promoted the Jewish Outreach and the Hebrew Bible project, Roberts may have played a notable role in the emergence of Christian Zionism as a transnational movement.⁵⁹

Motivating Factors

In the next section of the article, we discuss two motivating factors that propelled the Hebrew Bible project, namely, Oral Roberts' trips to Israel and his eschatology. Roberts' trips to Israel served as a focal point for the Hebrew Bible project. They also provided exhilarating religious experiences that Roberts would report with intense emotion. He wrote, "There is a feeling akin to awe that sweeps over me when I step on the soil of Israel."⁶⁰ Memories of these travels, recorded in magazines and books, display Roberts' affection for the Jewish people and the nation of Israel.

On his first trip in December 1953, Roberts "received a great new spiritual understanding of Jesus Christ and of his love for the people of the world."⁶¹ Consequently, he hatched plans for ministry in Israel, hoping to "come back to old Jerusalem to the Arab side as well as to the Israel side."⁶² He stated, "We hope to bring our big tent and I hope to have a great Holy Spirit outpouring. I hope to see a tremendous nation-wide healing campaign." Roberts envisioned "thousands of Jews and Arabs who are sick and who need to be saved and healed."⁶³ Parenthetically, we should note that Oral Roberts never brought his tent to Israel and did not hold a revival crusade in the region. After going into the Upper Room, the site that commemorates the New Testament Pentecost, and praying there, Roberts surmised, "We know something is happening to us. We have been in the upper room. We are now out of the upper room with fire in our souls."⁶⁴ This Upper Room experience so impressed Roberts that ten years later when on a trip around the world, he stopped in Jerusalem, again visiting the Upper Room "for

prayer and dedication” and to “pray for the partners of this ministry.”⁶⁵

Oral Roberts was proud of his knowledge of the land of Israel and professed great love for the Israeli people. On his second trip in 1955 Roberts filmed “three major television programs.”⁶⁶ On this trip he was privileged to “present Premier David Ben-Gurion a personally inscribed Hebrew Bible, with both the Old and New Testaments.”⁶⁷ According to Roberts’ recollection, he approached Ben Gurion with a Hebrew Bible and asked, “Would you accept this as a token of the love of the Christian people who also love Israel?” Ben Gurion replied, “Mr. Roberts, I would be very proud to have it.”⁶⁸ Roberts asserted that after leaving Israel, he “did not lose the spell that had fallen over [him].”⁶⁹ Indeed, Roberts’ feeling toward Israel significantly motivated his Jewish outreach work.

Perhaps the most significant of Oral Roberts’ trips to Israel took place in 1968 with the World Action Singers from ORU.⁷⁰ Roberts boasted that Israeli government officials met his entourage at the airport and “the press took pictures and the airport authorities got us quickly through customs without opening our bags (nearly every bag contained Hebrew Bibles!)”⁷¹ He remarked that Israel and Jerusalem were drastically different from when he first saw them, but even the fifth time seeing Jerusalem, he was astonished by the “quickenings” he felt as he observed “the fulfillment of prophecy.”⁷² On this trip, Evelyn Roberts stated she “always” cried in Jerusalem thinking about the Jewish people.⁷³ She was especially encouraged by the World Action Team’s visit because she trusted that “the Holy Spirit will help us to allow Jesus to shine through us as never before.”⁷⁴ Oral felt “an entirely different spirit” in Israel on this visit, his fifth time in the land, which he felt was being restored “as a direct result of prophecy.”⁷⁵ He was inspired by the daily “bitter cry” of the Jews at the Wailing Wall, “Come, Messiah. Come, Messiah.”⁷⁶ The World Action Team led an event on the Hebrew University campus. They also performed in Galilee and were so well-received that the tour guide office was “flooded with phone calls from people who had been there.”⁷⁷ The World Action Singers gave an encore performance to Israeli soldiers near the Syrian border, even though they had to be evacuated due to security concerns.⁷⁸ The highlight of the trip for Oral Roberts was the opportunity to go on Radio Israel. Roberts

claimed that he never expected in his “fondest hopes” to “include Radio Israel” on the trip, especially not “on the evening before their Sabbath (like our Saturday night in the U.S.) when the entire nation would be listening.”⁷⁹ He was especially ecstatic for the prime opportunity, “as president of a University, having a group of students with me,” to “give a nationwide witness to Israel.”⁸⁰

More than anything else, Oral Roberts’ motivation for the Hebrew Bible project was grounded in his eschatology. Harrell observes, as a “devout premillennialist,” Roberts felt that he was seeing Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in the “land where momentous happenings were about to begin, including the conversion of the Jewish nation to Christianity.”⁸¹ When Roberts was on the Mount of Olives in 1954, he was overcome with a premonition that “Jesus was coming soon.” Gripped by a sense of Christ’s soon coming, kneeling with tears streaming down his face, Roberts cried out to God, “Wait a little, Jesus, wait a little. Let me go back to America and warn the people of your soon coming. Give me and others a little more time to tell the people to get ready. Give us time to save souls and heal the sick. Give us a little more time, Jesus.”⁸² Speaking of the last days, Roberts opined, “I believe our Hebrew Bibles are a powerful witness for that day and a vital key to its glorious dawning.”⁸³

In his writings Roberts often delineated a dispensational scheme of events that would occur with Israel at center stage in the end times. He viewed the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel as a sign of the imminence of the end times. In *God’s Timetable for the End of Time*, he exclaimed, “Last, but by no means the least of the definite signs of the last days, is the return of the Jews to Palestine.”⁸⁴ Roberts believed, as did his fellow dispensationalists, that the return of the Jews would set in motion a series of apocalyptic events ending with the battle of Armageddon. In the intervening period it was thought that “with eyes opened the Jews will accept Jesus as Messiah.”⁸⁵ Roberts was convinced that “God’s time will arrive. And when it does, thousands of Jews will avidly read the Bibles which have remained unread in their homes. The Holy Spirit will then reveal Jesus to them as their true Messiah.”⁸⁶ The connection between the Hebrew Bible and the plight of the Jews during the tribulation period will be made apparent as we

follow the train of Roberts' thoughts. Roberts explains, "The 42 months of the Tribulation shall be a period of unparalleled suffering involving all nations of the earth, and especially Israel."⁸⁷ During this time, the Antichrist will rebuild the Jewish Temple on Mount Moriah and set up his image, which will have the capacity to speak, compelling the Jews to fall down and worship the Antichrist. To further the deception, the "False Prophet shall publish a new Bible" portraying the Antichrist as God and deceiving the Jewish people into acclaiming him as their Messiah.⁸⁸ However, they will come to their senses when they realize that the abomination of desolation has come upon them, as foretold by the prophet Daniel.⁸⁹ Then, Roberts predicts, "The fires of the Great Tribulation will break upon the Jews with intense fury. Neither man nor woman will be spared. Upon [their] refusal to worship the Antichrist, they shall be slaughtered like sheep with the exception of those fortunate enough to escape to the mountain fortresses."⁹⁰ Then God will do a mysterious work. He will open the eyes of his ancient people to see that Jesus is their Messiah. Roberts averred, "That is another reason why we have distributed more than 100,000 Bibles in the Holy Land. Driven, humiliated, persecuted, the Jewish people at last shall realize that true peace and real security are to be found in the Holy One of Israel, who 'came unto his own and his own received him not' In the caves and dens of the earth the Jewish people will realize that they have rejected their own beloved Messiah."⁹¹ At this very moment, Roberts predicts, Jesus Christ will reveal himself and all Israel will see whom they have pierced and they will be saved. Christ will come back to earth, landing on the Mount of Olives according to Zechariah's prophecy, and he will proceed to set up his kingdom over the whole earth.⁹²

In his commentary on Daniel and Revelation, Oral Roberts reiterated his reasoning for burying Hebrew Bibles in the caves of Petra and Israel: "In the dens of the earth the Jewish people will realize that they have rejected their own beloved Messiah."⁹³ During "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer 30:7), a popular dispensational theme, Roberts predicts, the Jews who refuse to worship the Antichrist will seek refuge by hiding in caves. He posed the question, "Did you know that in the almost impenetrable mountains of Petra just southeast of Jerusalem

there are thousands of Bibles in the Hebrew language encased in covers, hidden away in the various caves for that day when the Jewish people shall see that they have worshiped the wrong one, when they shall start reading the Bible—the New Testament—and see who the Messiah really is Then will every Israeli have his eyes opened. He will know that he has been deceived.”⁹⁴

Theological Implications

One could question the veracity of Roberts’ predictions concerning the end times. We will leave it to the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. This much can be said: Oral Roberts viewed the Hebrew Bible project as crucial to the conversion of the Jews in the end times. We can commend Roberts for his confidence in the prescience of biblical prophecy. He deserves credit for avowing that God’s covenant relationship with his ancient people is unconditional, as Romans 11:2 affirms, “God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.” That Israel stands today confirms the big picture of Roberts’ prognostications. However, this is not all that should be said. Hence, we will take a closer look at two theological implications of the dispensational accents in the eschatology of Oral Roberts.

Many of the Pentecostal forebears of Oral Roberts uncritically embraced the dispensational hermeneutic formulated by John Nelson Darby and popularized by Cyrus I. Scofield.⁹⁵ The editors of several Pentecostal periodicals promoted the Scofield Reference Bible, even after it became apparent that the interpretive stance of its study notes was opposed to the distinctive Pentecostal emphasis on Spirit baptism with the accompaniment of speaking in tongues. To be fair, we acknowledge that dispensationalism provided early Pentecostals with a philosophy of history with which they could undergird the claim that their movement signified a new epoch in the history of Christianity.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, unintended implications followed from the Pentecostal appropriation of dispensationalism.

The first implication has to do with theological consistency. A central feature of Pentecostal and Charismatic theology is the belief that the outpouring of charismatic gifts represents the fulfillment

of the prophecy of the “latter rain” in Joel 2:23, 28. In opposition to this premise, dispensationalists held to the assumption that the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit did not continue after the apostolic age. According to Darby, a great parenthesis occurred in church history in the early second century, marking the termination of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit bestowed on the Day of Pentecost. Since dispensationalists believed that God himself had abolished the supernatural gifts, most of them regarded their purported reappearance in the twentieth century as a matter of human delusion at best, and Satanic counterfeit at worst. Hence, there was an inherent inconsistency between the basic tenets of dispensationalism and Pentecostal-Charismatic theology.⁹⁷

The second implication pertains to accuracy of Roberts’ predictions. Along with dispensationalists in general, Oral Roberts viewed the return of the Jews to Palestine as the hinge that would open the door for final redemption in the “kingdom age.” He viewed the Jews as “God’s timepiece” and construed the restoration of the state of Israel as a prophetic sign of the imminence of the second coming of Christ. Roberts understood certain select biblical passages to predict a fixed sequence of historical events that would culminate during the last days in the city of Jerusalem with the Jewish people converting to Jesus as their Messiah. This eschatological scenario colored his interpretation of current events transpiring in Palestine in the second half of the twentieth century. Oral Roberts believed that the immigration of Jewish people to Palestine was a sign of the imminence of the second coming of Christ and a signal that very soon a chain reaction would be activated leading to the war of Armageddon and the establishment of Christ’s millennial kingdom.

In retrospect, it is evident that image and reality parted company in the fine details of Oral Roberts’ prognostications. Assuredly, what he predicted concerning the mass conversion of the Jews has not happened. Furthermore, Roberts may have left a legacy that is an obstacle to peace in Israel/Palestine. By elevating the role of the Jews in their eschatological scenario, Roberts and other evangelical Christians in America blocked from their field of vision the rights of other peoples, Arab Muslims and Christians, who made up the majority of the

population of Palestine.⁹⁸ As a result, Oral Roberts' image of current events in Israel represented a skewed perspective rather than an accurate picture of Israel/Palestine as it is, the homeland of indigenous adherents of the Abrahamic faiths including Eastern Christians who since the Day of Pentecost have maintained a continuous presence in the Holy Land.

Conclusion

There is much to be learned from our telling of the story of Oral Roberts and the Hebrew Bible. Oral Roberts left a legacy of philo-Semitism, a love for God's ancient people. Early in his life he sensed a call to do a work among the Jewish people. To fulfill this calling, he included a Jewish outreach in his global vision and in collaboration with Myron Sackett promoted the publication and distribution of the Hebrew Bible. During his five trips to Israel Roberts confirmed his conviction that he had a role to play in the eschatological drama unfolding in current events. The commitment of Oral Roberts to stand with the people of Israel is commendable, even though his prediction concerning the conversion of the Jews by means of the Hebrew Bible has not yet measured up to the prophet's test of Deuteronomy 18:21–22.

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Notes

- 1 We are indebted to Kyle Hansen, whose 2015 ORU senior paper, “Oral Roberts and Israel: The Forgotten Story,” brought to our attention the story recounted in this article.
- 2 David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 1985), 134–35, note 157.
- 3 Roberts filmed three television programs during a trip to Israel in 1954—“The Christmas Story,” “The Easter Story,” and “The Second Coming of Jesus.” G. H. Montgomery, “The March of Deliverance,” *America’s Healing Magazine*, February 1955, 4 (hereafter *AHM*). For video of Oral Roberts in Israel, see Oral Roberts, “Trip to the Holy Land with Oral Roberts and Other Testimonies” (2018), *Oral Roberts Collection*, 9, http://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/or_collection/9.
- 4 For autobiographical information on Oral Roberts, see Oral Roberts, *Oral Roberts’ Life Story as Told by Himself* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts, 1952); Oral Roberts, *The Call: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972); Oral Roberts, *Expect a Miracle: My Life and Ministry* (La Vergne, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998). For an objective biography, Harrell, *Oral Roberts: An American Life*. For a critical account of Oral Roberts, see Jerry Sholes, *Give Me That Prime-Time Religion: An Insider’s Report on the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association* (Hawthorn Books, 1979). For OREA magazines, see *Healing Waters* (November 1947–August 1953); *America’s Healing Magazine* (September 1953–December 1955); *Healing* (January 1956–June 1956); and *Abundant Life* (July 1956–December 1991). For Oral Roberts’ eschatology, see Oral Roberts, *God’s Timetable for the End of Time* (Tulsa, OK: Heliotrope, 1969); Oral Roberts, *The Drama of the End-Time* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, 1963); Oral Roberts, *The Second Coming of Jesus: Sooner Than You Think* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts, 1995); Oral Roberts, *The Book of Daniel and the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ with Personal Commentary* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, 1968); Oral Roberts, *The New Testament Comes Alive*, 3 vols. (Nashville, TN: Parthenon Press, 1984).
- 5 Oral Roberts, *The Fourth Man and Other Famous Sermons* (Tulsa: Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, 1958), 71.
- 6 Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5.
- 7 Oral Roberts, “Second Call to Action,” *AHM*, January 1955, 6.
- 8 Roberts, “Second Call to Action,” 7.
- 9 Oral Roberts, “You and I Together with God Can Change the World,” *AHM*, October 1955, 15.
- 10 Oral Roberts, *The New Testament Comes Alive, Vol. 2, Acts—Philemon* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1984), 204–5.
- 11 Roberts, *New Testament Comes Alive, Vol. 2, Acts—Philemon*, 207.
- 12 Oral Roberts, *God’s Timetable for the End of Time* (Tulsa: Heliotrope, 1969), 26.
- 13 Robert Lisle Lindsey, *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark* (Jerusalem: Dugith Publishers, 1969), 159.

14 More countries began to see the need for Hebrew Scriptures and the lack thereof in Israel. In 1953, the Million Testament Campaign, headquartered in Philadelphia and led by George T. B. Davis and his Jewish wife Rose, began to provide New Testaments in Hebrew and other languages to Jews in the Holy Land and to Jews throughout the world. Petra van der Zande, *From McComb to Jerusalem: Life Story of Irene (Shaloma) Levi* (Jerusalem: Tsur Tsina Publications, 2017), 74.

15 Myron Sackett was born on October 20, 1899, in Leechburg, Pennsylvania. As a young adult he experienced salvation and baptism in the Holy Spirit at an Assemblies of God church in Washington, D.C. Six months later he sensed a call to the ministry. In 1925 he met Aimee Semple McPherson in Rochester, New York, reporting later that she said, “Brother, come to California, I need you in my ministry.” In 1928 he married Francis Mae Sheerlein and in 1929 they moved to California and became active members of Angelus Temple and attended Life Bible College (LIFE = Lighthouse of International Foursquare Evangelism). After graduation Myron and Mae were both ordained as ministers of the International Foursquare Church. The Sacketts were close associates of Aimee McPherson, managing her crusades. In 1938 McPherson appointed Myron as superintendent of the California conference. McPherson passed away in September 1944 from a cerebral hemorrhage suffered during the night following a meeting held at the Foursquare Church in Oakland, California, at which the head pastors were Myron and Mae Sackett. Sackett went on to found Christian Friends of Israel and serve as an evangelist to the Jewish people for thirteen years, making several trips to Israel and distributing the Hebrew Bible to Israeli schools. “Testimony and Sermon of Dr. Sackett,” August 8, 1960, Transcript of Audio Tape #5072-71762/12, Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK; “Interview of Francis Mae Sackett: Worker with Sister Aimee McPherson,” October 25, 1987, Transcript of Audio Tape #5226-86520/12, Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK.

16 Unto Kunnas, *Kaarlo Syväntö: Pioneer in Israel 1947–1998* (Eugene, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 20016), 105–6, 110–12, 118.

17 G. H. Montgomery, “Dr. Sackett Joins Oral Roberts’ Staff,” *AHM*, June 1955, 7. Montgomery gives April 1, 1955, as the date on which Sackett incorporated his ministry with OREA. Oral Roberts gives April 1, 1954, as the date in “How I Remember Myron Sackett,” *Abundant Life*, November 1967, 24 (hereafter *AL*).

18 Oral Roberts, “How I Remember Myron Sackett,” *AL*, November 1967, 23. Roberts states that Sackett “died in the early 1970s” in *Your Road to Recovery* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson, 1986), 103.

19 It should be noted that Oral Roberts claimed to have “met with David Ben-Gurion twice, as well as the mayor of Jerusalem and other top officials in Israel. I had negotiated with them a way to get the complete Bible—both Old Testament and New Testament—into fairly wide circulation in Israel. They had agreed that if we printed the Bibles in Hebrew, they would put them in the libraries, schools, and other government places as a way of getting the people to relearn the Hebrew language. I dreamed of printing one hundred thousand copies of the Bible for Israel. Dr. Sackett had a similar dream.” Roberts, *Your Road to Recovery*, 103–4.

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- 21 Sackett, "How We Are Taking Christ to the Jews," 20.
- 22 Sackett, "How We Are Taking Christ to the Jews," 19.
- 23 Myron Sackett, "Can Israel Live Again?" *AL*, February 1958, 8.
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- 26 An advertisement for a February-March free copy of *Christian Friends of Israel Messenger* is found on p. 20 of the March 1956 issue of *Healing*.
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- 28 Sackett, "How We Are Taking Christ to the Jews," 21.
- 29 Roberts, "How I Remember Myron Sackett," 24.
- 30 Myron Sackett, "Developments of the Israel Work," *Healing*, June 1956, 14.
- 31 Sackett, "Developments of the Israel Work," 14.
- 32 Sackett, "Can Israel Live Again?" 9.
- 33 Sackett, "How We Are Taking Christ to the Jews," 21.
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- 35 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle: My Life and Ministry*, 150–51.
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- 37 Roberts, "You and I Together with God Can Change the World," 16.
- 38 Myron Sackett, "My Call to Witness and Bring Deliverance to Jewish Rabbis," *AL*, September 1962, 17–19. See also Myron Sackett, "Some of My Experiences with Jewish Leaders," *AL*, December 1962, 20–23.
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- 40 Oral Roberts, "Second Call to Action," *AHM*, January 1955, 7. For the OREA official start of the Hebrew Bible ministry, see "Fourth Phase of World Outreach Launched!" *AHM*, December 1955, 17.
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- 46 Roberts, "The Spell of Israel over Me!" 8.
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- 53 Roberts, "How I Remember Myron Sackett," 25.
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- 61 Sackett, "How We Are Taking Christ to the Jews," 21.
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- 69 Roberts, *The Drama of the End-Time*, 84.
- 70 Roberts, "God Opened the Doors for World Action," 6.
- 71 Roberts, "God Opened the Doors for World Action," 6.
- 72 Roberts, "God Opened the Doors for World Action," 6.
- 73 Roberts, "God Opened the Doors for World Action," 7.
- 74 Roberts, "God Opened the Doors for World Action," 7.
- 75 Roberts, "God Opened the Doors for World Action," 8.
- 76 Roberts, "God Opened the Doors for World Action," 8.
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- 78 Roberts, "God Opened the Doors for World Action," 10–11.
- 79 Roberts, "God Opened the Doors for World Action," 11.
- 80 Roberts, "God Opened the Doors for World Action," 11.

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- 82 Oral Roberts, "The Burning Bush and the Pentecostal Fire," *AHM*, August 1954, 6.
- 83 Roberts, *The Drama of the End-Time*, 86.
- 84 Roberts, *God's Timetable for the End of Time*, 23.
- 85 Roberts, *The Drama of the End-Time*, 11.
- 86 Roberts, *God's Timetable for the End of Time*, 42–43.
- 87 Roberts, *God's Timetable for the End of Time*, 77.
- 88 Roberts, *God's Timetable for the End of Time*, 89.
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- 90 Roberts, *God's Timetable for the End of Time*, 89.
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- 92 Roberts, *The New Testament Comes Alive: Vol. 1*, 355.
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- 94 Roberts, *The Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation*, 112, 116.
- 95 Dispensationalism is so named because it generally divides history into a series of seven ages or dispensations. In each dispensation God offers prosperity to his people in return for obedience, or judgment in return for disobedience. Darby postulated that there were two divine plans revealed in Scripture. One plan was for the Jews, God's earthly people. The other plan was for Christian Church, God's heavenly people. God's plan for the Jews was revealed through a series of covenants with the nation of Israel, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah. But when the Jews rejected Jesus, interrupting the divine plan, God postponed the kingdom and temporarily removed his hand of blessing from the Jews. From that time on God's redemptive plan for the Jews was put on hold and would not be resumed until the second coming of Christ. Darby believed that the Jews were being punished by being persecuted throughout the world and that the biblical prophecies relating to the Jews would not be completely fulfilled until an indeterminate future time during the millennium. In the meantime, God implemented the second plan by creating a new chosen people, formed mainly of Gentiles, who made up the Church. According to Darby, the return of Christ would be delayed until the gospel is preached to every tribe, every people, and every nation in the world. Clarence B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism: Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implications* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 55; Peter E. Prosser, *Dispensationalist Eschatology and Its Influence on American and Religious Movements* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 255–58.
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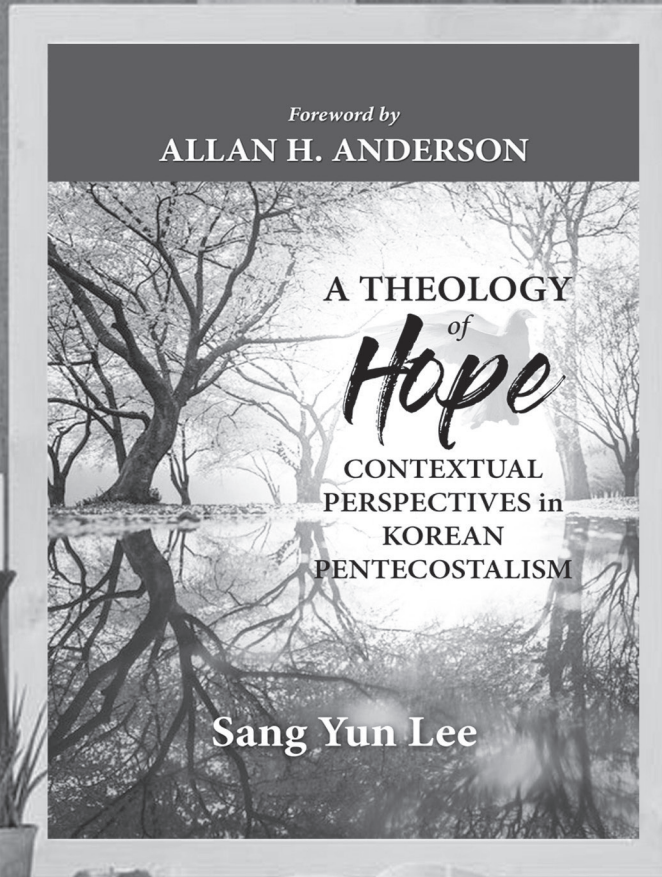
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A HISTORY OF ORU HEALING TEAMS

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Abstract

Healing teams were a revolutionary idea Oral Roberts began to formulate in the 1960s. The concept of the healing team developed from Roberts' healing ministry, the university, and a vision to continue his healing ministry beyond his lifetime. He hoped to raise up students from the academic colleges within Oral Roberts University to be healers within their respective disciplines. The general healing teams concept involved a team of professionals from various disciplines such as medicine, education, business, law, social work, theology, and others that minister to the whole person and all of his or her needs. This article traces the history of healing teams from the original development of the idea to its decline and finally to its recent reemergence.

Introduction

Healing teams were a revolutionary idea Oral Roberts began to formulate in the 1960s. The concept of the healing team developed from Roberts' healing ministry, the university, and a vision to continue his healing ministry beyond his lifetime. He hoped to raise up students from the academic colleges within Oral Roberts University (ORU) to

be healers within their respective disciplines. The general healing teams concept involved a team of professionals from various disciplines such as medicine, education, business, law, social work, theology, and others that minister to the whole person and all of his or her needs.

The concept and vision for healing teams evolved over time to become what Roberts called God's "Miracle Plan" to bring Christ's healing power to the nations. He understood that success without a successor is failure, so he believed that healing teams were the ultimate succession plan to continue his global healing ministry. He also believed healing teams would have a significant impact on world missions and were essential for bringing the gospel into nations hostile to Christianity, resulting in fulfillment of the great commission.

The scope of the healing teams vision was so great that Roberts was planning to shift the major emphasis of the university and City of Faith to training, funding, and sending healing teams to every nation on earth. Further, the idea of cross-pollination at ORU occurred in tandem with the healing teams concept. Because cross-pollination involved interdisciplinary interactions between students and faculty from different disciplines, it was central to implementing the healing teams vision. The discussions at ORU regarding healing teams and theoretical development of the concept as a part of the cross-pollination task force culminated in the 1979 pilot at the Spafford Clinic in Jerusalem. The pilot was developed in preparation for implementation of the long-term healing teams vision, which included sending thousands of graduates by the turn of the century.

Although healing teams were at the forefront of Roberts' plans for the 1980s and 1990s and the concept was being developed internally among faculty and staff, the vision was never implemented. The healing teams concept continued to occur in archival documents from the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s, but the idea declined somewhere between 1984 and 1988. However, over thirty years after the original healing teams pilot, the concept reemerged again through discussions among faculty, deans, and the provost. This article traces the history of healing teams from the original development of the idea to its decline and finally to its recent reemergence.

The Healing Teams Concept

It is important to understand the broader definition of the concept Roberts called “healing teams.” Although he was a healing evangelist who prayed for the sick, he had a vision that extended far beyond the supernatural manifestation of physical healing alone. He was pioneering the idea that God heals both miraculously and through medicine. During a time when there was little to no understanding that the physician’s ability to heal through medicine and God’s ability to heal miraculously might intersect, Roberts taught how to combine God’s healing streams of prayer and medicine. The idea that God can heal through merging prayer and medicine was a revelation to many Christians, but at the same time, controversial to the secular world.¹

Revolutionary as it was, Roberts’ vision for healing did not stop at the point of merging prayer and medicine. He believed in the idea of healing for the totality of human need. This means that healing is holistic in nature, and a person could receive healing in every area of his or her life, such as finances, legal matters, relationships, and mental or emotional health. This thinking led to the concept of the healing team. Although there was not an exact definition of the healing team, the concept was consistent throughout the archives. The healing team was a group of professionals from various disciplines, including medicine, dentistry, nursing, education, business, law, social work, theology, music, and others, that minister to the whole person and all of his or her needs.²

The most comprehensive definition of the concept came as a result of Mark Stern’s 1980 thesis, which included interviews of Oral Roberts University personnel and a literature review within the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association library. The subsequent definition was:

A healing team is a team of persons who have been, and are continually experiencing healing in their own lives, correctly related to the source of all healing. It is a team of professionals, who are skilled, capable, adaptable, unified, well-instructed individuals; all trained to bring harmony and restoration via their various disciplines such as business, medicine, dentistry, theology,

nursing, education, law; selected on the basis of the need of the situation, dictated by the circumstances, environment, culture, and condition of the people; and all dedicated to bringing total healing to the whole man, spirit, mind, and body.³

Roberts' Ultimate Succession Plan

The direct purpose of the healing team was to minister healing to the totality of human need as articulated in the definition of the concept. However, Roberts had a much broader vision regarding the purpose of developing healing teams. God had called Roberts to bring healing to his generation, but he did not want to see the healing ministry end with his passing. Thus, Roberts was passionate about succession, and he viewed healing teams as his ultimate succession plan to continue the healing ministry far beyond his lifetime. He stated,

In the 1960s, God told me, "Success without a successor is failure. Build Me a university. Build it on My authority and on the Holy Spirit. Raise up your students to hear My voice; to go where My light is dim, My voice is heard small, My power is not known; even to the uttermost parts of the earth. And their work will exceed yours and in that I am well pleased At the end of this academic school year we will be able, for the first time, to graduate classes from all eight schools at Oral Roberts University, and will start sending healing teams to the nations with this healing ministry of Jesus Christ, our Lord."⁴

Because Roberts firmly believed in taking God's healing power to the uttermost parts of the earth, he realized that he, as one man, could not do this alone. He had also witnessed other healing ministers passing away without leaving a successor to continue the healing ministry. These were two significant factors that drove his thinking behind the healing teams concept. For instance, in a personal word from Roberts in the *Abundant Life* magazine, he was quoted as follows:

In 1969, as I stood on the soil of East Africa and preached to as many as 100,000 people a day, God began to give me a burden and vision for sending healing teams back there some day. Teams of young doctors, dentists, nurses, lawyers, business people, singers, and others could take God's healing power to the world in an even greater way than I, being one man, could ever do. Since that time, my soul has been on fire to do what God has called me to do. And, in faith, we at Oral Roberts University have been preparing in every way we know for the time when God would open the doors for the Healing Teams to go into all the nations of the world.⁵

Healing Teams, World Missions, and the Great Commission

Not only did Roberts view the healing teams as the ultimate succession plan for continuing his healing ministry, but he also believed healing teams would impact the future of world missions and were critical for fulfilling the great commission. He realized that fulfilling the great commission meant gaining access into nations that were hostile or closed to the gospel. He commented how missionaries were being driven out of certain nations or how many countries have simply closed their doors to traditional missionaries. As a result, he projected that healing teams would be the answer to bringing God's healing power to these closed countries. For instance, Roberts said, "With Marxism and Communism spreading and missionaries being driven out of countries, I can see God preparing the way for our healing teams consisting of young physicians, dentists, nurses, evangelists, singers and prayer partners. Their going will be God's way of getting His healing power into these nations."⁶

This belief was echoed by others at the university, such as James Winslow and Oral's son Richard Roberts. Winslow stated, "We must seek God's will for how we're going to take God's healing power—and a part of this ministry, this university and this medical center—not just to Africa but to the uttermost parts of the earth. We must fulfill the great

commission that Christ gave us and the call that we have on our lives to take God's healing power to this generation."⁷ Richard Roberts also commented, "Without the teams coming out of ORU and the City of Faith, we will never be able to take the gospel into countries which have closed their doors to traditional missionaries."⁸

Oral Roberts further felt that healing teams would not only grant access into closed countries, but that the concept would also have a worldwide impact on missions. His belief was that healing teams would cause world missions to take on a new meaning and structure, and that they would play a substantial role in fulfilling the great commission. Roberts predicted,

Missions will take on a new meaning. Missions will take on a new structure. Foreign missions in the future will be healing teams that will be acceptable by nations. And they'll not be driven out of nations as easily as just ordinary missionaries are as fine of people as they are. This signals a new beginning for the world's salvation and healing. And to me it signals in the most concrete way I know the beginning of the end of the Gospel reach. For when this Gospel of the kingdom is preached, is witnessed to all nations, then shall the end come. Without our healing teams being part of that, I don't think the end can come. Because only the healing team concept can truly minister to a whole nation. So we are part of the biggest thing on God's earth.⁹

The Scope of the Healing Teams Vision

With such a significant mandate, the scope of Roberts' healing teams vision was massive. In the late 1970s, he began to envision training hundreds of healing teams. For instance, he stated, "God let me see 800 teams of about 12 members each, or almost 10,000 of our students going into all nations at the appointed times."¹⁰ Given the mandate to fulfill the great commission through sending hundreds of healing teams, Jimmy Buskirk echoed Roberts' vision and suggested ORU would play a pivotal role among sending agencies involved in world missions.

Buskirk stated the following during a baccalaureate speech in 1979: “Wait till you hear the president describe how many missionaries we’re going to have by 1980. Wait until you hear him say that by the year 2000 we’re going to have more missionaries through the healing teams going out to all the world than all the rest of the agencies shall send altogether. God may call you to be a member of one of those healing teams.”¹¹

Later, as the vision continued to develop, the scope of the healing teams vision expanded. Roberts predicted in 1984, “By the year 2000, my goal is that 1,000 Healing Teams with not less than 21,000 young men and women will be in the nations—a new first for God!”¹² Further, an announcement in 1984 that was picked up by newspapers around the U.S. read, “‘We are ready to release healing teams to the ends of the Earth,’ Roberts said Sunday in his weekly TV show. ‘There will be 12 to 30 skilled professionals on each team, and by the year 2000 and on into the 21st century, our goal is 1,000 healing teams from ORU (Oral Roberts University) at work around the world.’”¹³

The healing teams vision was so significant to Roberts that he believed it was the biggest part of the ministry that he had been called by God to fulfill. This was his succession plan and the pinnacle of the vision for which the university had been founded. By the early 1980s, Roberts was explicitly shifting his focus from the main building program and establishment of the graduate schools to developing, funding, and sending healing teams.¹⁴ For instance, he said,

It’s taken all these years since the day I stood in that African village and heard God first talk to me about Healing Teams to get ready to send them to the nations. It’s taken our crusades, radio and TV programs, putting literature in 80 languages, building Oral Roberts University and the City of Faith—all have played a major part in bringing me and you, my Partner, to this hour of our destiny. I’m told there are 210 nations and/or protectorates on earth. To train 1,000 teams at Oral Roberts University and the City of Faith by the end of this century to be in those nations and protectorates will take a miracle commitment by my faithful and steadfast Partners as well as new Partners.¹⁵

Roberts believed the fulfillment of God's mandate to send healing teams was inextricably linked to the City of Faith, and the size and scope of the vision was beyond what anyone could imagine. Thus, healing teams would be trained and sent out from the City of Faith to carry on his healing ministry beyond his lifetime. Due to the magnitude of what this mandate meant to Oral Roberts, he was willing to spend every last dollar, and even die, to see the fulfillment of this dream. Roberts proclaimed,

The City of Faith will merge medicine and prayer for our partners. But it will also be the final training place for our healing teams . . . people just can't understand how big this whole thing is. To send out hundreds of healing teams, who will keep the healing ministry going long after I'm gone, it takes large facilities, lots of workers, and many, many dollars. What am I going to do? Exactly what God told me. I'll build until the last dollar is used and if it's not finished I'll have to close down. But I will obey God! I'd rather die than fail to see this ministry become a whole so that the healing teams can do what I can't do with God's call to take His healing power into all the nations . . .¹⁶

Cross-Pollination and Healing Teams

While Roberts was communicating the magnitude of the healing teams vision that would take ORU into the next century, the idea of cross-pollination was being developed within ORU. The term "cross-pollination" was central to whole person education at the university. The idea was that a student's learning is enhanced through interdisciplinary instruction and projects. This meant that students should develop an understanding of various subjects beyond their own professional and personal perspectives. The purpose of cross-pollination at ORU was to ". . . facilitate, from a Christian perspective, the growth of the whole person through limited contact with the essence of other disciplines."¹⁷

Cross-pollination was promoted as the concept of interaction

through which the mission of graduating the whole person—mind, body, and spirit—is accomplished. The following definition and purpose of cross-pollination relating to whole person education was developed:

As a process, cross-pollination involves contact; exchange and transfer of knowledge; and development of relationships throughout the university, in both informal and academic settings. The student gains an appreciation and understanding of human experience reaching beyond professional specialization. So prepared, the graduate can interact in every person's world in a way reflective of Christ's concern for the totality of human need.¹⁹

The cross-pollination idea demonstrated ORU's commitment to a lifestyle of personal and professional wholeness. Thus, interdisciplinary interactions between students and faculty were encouraged in which they exchanged perspectives within a Christian environment.²⁰

The development of cross-pollination at ORU was central to the healing teams concept. For instance, in addition to developing and promoting cross-pollination across the university, the cross-pollination task force helped develop the theoretical framework of the healing teams concept. The work of the task force included creating a training course named "Cross-Pollination," which played a role in training healing teams to minister around the world. For instance, cross-pollination research suggested that healing teams should conduct an environmental analysis in preparation for the trip, and that the starting point of the analysis should be a literature review. The healing team should also implement a needs assessment through collecting primary and secondary data in order to understand the context of the culture. The outcome of the initial research should be development of a thorough understanding of the people and their lifestyle. Preparation, feedback, and evaluation should all be part of training healing teams.²¹

The Healing Teams Pilot: Spafford Clinic

During the time when the healing team concept was discussed extensively within ORU, the idea was piloted in 1979 at the Spafford Clinic in Jerusalem. The clinic was started by Bertha Spafford Vester on Christmas day in 1925 when she took in a newborn baby after his mother died soon after birth. Within a week of agreeing to care for the child, she was asked to take in two more babies, which resulted in the birth of a “baby home.” She later raised funds to convert the home into a hospital due to the lack of a children’s hospital in Jerusalem. More than fifty years after Bertha Spafford Vester took in her first child, the Spafford Clinic grew to become a ministry in the Old City of Jerusalem that provided medical care to 25,000 women and children.²²

Oral Roberts originally heard about the clinic in 1975 from a guest on one of his television specials. An associate of ORU later visited the clinic and learned that Spafford was facing financial difficulties. As a result, Oral Roberts University assumed sponsorship of the clinic, and Spafford became a seed-faith outreach for the university. Students from business, dentistry, education, HPE, music, pre-med, social work, and theology participated in the 1979 healing teams pilot trip. The pilot healing team was broken into groups to conduct rotations at the Spafford Clinic and other cooperating institutions. Students were to observe and serve for one week in various institutions in order to study different styles of health care distribution in order to develop a program for utilization.²³

In preparation for the long-term vision of healing teams, which included sending graduates of Oral Roberts University, the pilot involved sending a short-term team of upper-level undergraduate and graduate students. There were several stated purposes of the pilot. First, the ORU Spafford outreach was created for students to provide assistance in their field of study to help people in the Middle East by providing health care, love, and concern. A second goal was for the healing team to foster an environment at Spafford promoting reconciliation between Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Third, it was hoped that the Spafford Clinic would provide a medical base station for the training of students for healing teams in a politically and religiously

charged environment. Finally, observation of the group was planned to assist in the future development of the Healing Teams Training Program.²⁴

A detailed outline of the program was created to ensure the experience included knowledge of the people and land, cultural immersion, and exposure to the health care sector. With the overarching goal of improving health care utilization, the team was broken into smaller groups to study the different styles of health care provision through rotations at Spafford and other participating institutions. Institutions included in the rotation were the Spafford House, Lutheran World Federation, Near East Council of Churches, hospitals, Catholic Relief Services, and Holy Land Christian Mission. The population served was Arab, but the composition of the area varied among urban, rural, and refugee groups. Thus, the various institutions and diverse population composition allowed the students to conduct a comparative study of the needs of the people served in each area.²⁵

Healing Teams: Failed, Forgotten, and Found Again

By the early 1980s, there was no question that healing teams topped Oral Roberts' agenda for the next two decades. The vision was being communicated to students, faculty, staff, partners, and the general public. The healing teams concept was being developed internally among administrative leadership as well as faculty and piloted externally through ORU students. Although there was strong institutional support from the president at the top to students across every major, the healing teams vision was never implemented. There are many theories why healing teams never made it past the pilot stage, but no explanation exists throughout the archival evidence. In fact, the healing teams concept disappears from archival evidence altogether after 1984.

The consensus among many students, faculty, and administration studying or working at ORU during this time period is that the City of Faith was the central reason why the healing teams concept failed. The reasoning is that the healing teams were inextricably tied to the City of Faith. Therefore, the healing teams vision vanished in the wake of the financial troubles facing the City of Faith. Roberts had been gearing up

to shift the major thrust of his fundraising campaigns toward healing teams. However, his fundraising campaigns were ultimately rerouted in attempts to rescue the City of Faith. The subsequent closure of the City of Faith sealed the fate of the healing teams vision before it was ever implemented. There may have been other factors involved, but the failure of the City of Faith appears to be the leading factor that led to the demise of the healing teams vision.

Consequently, the healing teams vision was not implemented as originally planned. The idea ultimately failed to maintain institutional support or play a role in the future planning of the university. However, the vision was not entirely forgotten. Many students, faculty, and administration impacted by Roberts' passion for healing teams have held the vision in their hearts for more than three decades. These alumni, faculty, and staff have maintained an excitement about healing teams just as they did several decades earlier. Thus, although the healing teams concept had been dormant at ORU and ceased as an initiative at the university, the vision and passion have remained alive over the last several decades.

Over thirty years after the original pilot, the healing teams vision suddenly reemerged at Oral Roberts University. God spoke to a junior member of the faculty who had never heard of the healing teams vision. During prayer regarding plans for the future, the faculty member felt he heard God say the words "healing teams" as the answer to seeking direction for the next stage of his life. The unfamiliar words led him to reach out to senior faculty members in efforts to understand what the term "healing teams" might mean. It was through conversations with these senior faculty members that the healing teams vision was reborn. Later, during meetings with academic deans and the provost, it was agreed that God was in fact directing leadership to relaunch the healing teams vision at ORU.

Healing Teams in the Twenty-first Century

With the healing teams vision resurrected at ORU, plans were made to attempt a new pilot healing teams trip over thirty-five years after the original pilot. The pilot was scheduled to launch in Carrilho, Brazil,

during the summer of 2015, and plans were made to begin recruiting and training students to participate on the Brazil Healing Team. As described in the original concept, the healing team is based upon the needs of the situation. Thus, the first year of the pilot was designed as a needs assessment and projects were implemented over the subsequent three years. Using an interdisciplinary approach, a literature review was initially conducted by the various majors on the team, which included business, engineering, global environmental sustainability, nursing, pre-med, psychology, and social work. A needs assessment questionnaire was developed from the literature review and contextualized based upon the local situation. The Progress Out of Poverty Index (PPI) was also used to determine the level of poverty in the community.

In cooperation with leaders from the community, the ORU healing team members developed several projects based upon the needs assessment. For instance, the primary source of income for the village was cashew roasting and shelling. Middlemen would collect cashews in trucks from farms and drop the cashews off for the community members to roast and shell. They would later return to pick up the cashews to sell to market. A cashew cooperative existed in the community; the cooperative was able to purchase from farmers and sell directly to the market. The cooperative was struggling but had the potential to improve the livelihoods of its members. Thus, the business team focused its efforts on building capacity within the cooperative by developing marketing plans, training employees, and helping the company seek export markets.

The traditional method of roasting cashews includes cooking the cashew in its shell over an open fire. The cashew oil inside the shell is toxic and highly flammable. As soon as the cashew heats to a certain temperature, the entire shell ignites into flames emitting significant amounts of black smoke. As a result, the roasting huts are completely coated in black soot and community members are exposed to high levels of toxic smoke. Therefore, the engineering students endeavored to design a cook stove that would eliminate smoke emissions released during the roasting process. The students chose a simple, inexpensive design with locally available materials and worked alongside community members to test the stoves in the community with a goal

of empowering local community members to develop the idea into a business.

The needs assessment also revealed that community members faced poor quality and inadequate access to health care. To meet immediate health needs, nursing faculty and students along with pre-med students conducted a series of health clinics in the village focused on varying health needs, including diabetes, hypertension, and hygiene. The ORU medical team worked with the local Secretary of Health as well as local health workers to set up free community clinics to conduct health assessments, treat patients, and provide health education. As individuals moved through the stations conducting assessments, treatment, and education, each patient was prayed for by different members of the ORU healing team. The ultimate aim of the medical outreach was not only to treat immediate needs but attempt to impact long-term community health through education.

The education students discovered several important issues in the school in Carrilho needing improvement, such as student motivation, parent-teacher communication, and teacher training. In cooperation with the local Secretary of Education, the education students began to discuss potential ideas to address the needs. It was agreed upon that implementing a comprehensive teacher training program should be the central focus to address the primary needs. To develop this program, ORU College of Education faculty worked with the students to develop five sessions of training covering topics such as assessment and effective teaching, classroom management, organization and administration, educational leadership, supervision, and evaluation and curriculum design and instruction. The hope is that a highly effective certificate program will be developed to build capacity among teachers serving in the local schools.

Healing Teams: The Next Chapter

The Brazil Healing Team pilot proved to be an effective testing ground for implementing multidisciplinary projects based on the needs of a rural village in Brazil. Community members' lives were impacted, students grew professionally and spiritually, and much was learned

about implementing the healing teams concept. For instance, key insights from the pilot included training and equipping the healing team, conducting the needs assessment, and implementing simultaneous interdisciplinary projects. While there is still a lot to learn about effectively implementing Oral Roberts' vision for healing teams, the pilot generated enough positive feedback to move beyond the pilot stage to begin rolling out a full healing teams program.

To roll out the program, the next location selected was back on the continent of Africa where God originally placed the healing teams vision on Oral Roberts' heart, but this time further south in Africa with Celebration Church in the country of Zimbabwe. With the needs assessment refined, the Zimbabwe Healing Team set out to conduct the literature search, develop questionnaires, and implement the needs assessment during the summer of 2017. The needs assessment revealed the situation was much more desperate compared to Brazil and could be described as grinding, hand-to-mouth poverty. The community chosen in Zimbabwe was a new peri-urban settlement comprised of families that were relocated from slums surrounding Harare. Thus, families relocated to the area came with almost nothing and had to build temporary housing out of whatever materials they could find, such as plastic, thatch, cardboard, and sheet metal.

Students from various disciplines, such as business, education, engineering, global environmental sustainability, international community development, media, nursing, pre-med, social work, and theology, have participated on the Zimbabwe Healing Team. After completing the needs assessment, the multidisciplinary team has been working with Celebration Church contacts and local community members to develop and implement sustainable solutions based on the needs assessment. Due to the interconnected dynamics of poverty, a significant amount of interdisciplinary work has been required to develop projects. For instance, families in the community are significantly malnourished. They eat about two meals per day comprised of tea, a local corn meal called sadza, and occasional vegetables grown in small gardens. Thus, families live almost entirely off of food handouts and food security is a critical issue. In addition, formal employment is nonexistent, and available jobs are informal and

provide an inconsistent source of income.

To address the pressing needs of poor nutrition and low income, students from business, environmental sustainability, and engineering have worked together to develop agribusiness projects that improve food security and generate income. In addition, theology students are working alongside the other majors to ensure the projects incorporate discipleship principles and connect individuals with the local church. The goal is to scale the agribusiness projects across the community with the possibility of developing cooperative growing and distribution methods to maximize profit potential within the community while continuing to strengthen food security. With the Zimbabwe Healing Team having completed its first year beyond the needs assessment, several initiatives similar to the agribusiness project are currently in the developmental stages.

Conclusion

The healing teams concept is once again taking hold at ORU, but important questions exist regarding the scope and purpose of the healing teams vision. For instance, Oral Roberts envisioned at least 1,000 healing teams ministering around the world by the twenty-first century, and he was positioning the main fundraising efforts at ORU to send these teams to influence world missions and play a role in fulfilling the great commission. However, the healing teams effort was initially launched with the anticipated success of the medical school in which healing teams would be trained and sent out of the City of Faith with a substantial donor base funding the vision. The plan was for the healing teams to be comprised of graduates that would move overseas upon graduation rather than a primarily student-led model with the involvement of a few faculty and professionals.

Although many questions remain concerning the future of healing teams, there is clear institutional support for the initiative, and students, faculty, and staff are energized by the return of Oral Roberts' vision at ORU. For instance, only a few years after the return of Roberts' healing teams vision to ORU, President William Wilson created the Office of Global Service. This new office provides support service to

the entire university as part of the globalization direction and effort at ORU, and the Office of Global Service is responsible for developing and implementing the healing teams vision. In addition, the Office of Global Service works closely with ORU Missions and Outreach to recruit, train, and prepare students for participation on healing teams. Thus, Oral Roberts' vision for healing teams is well-positioned for the future with the Brazil pilot recently concluded, a second location launched in Zimbabwe, and the healing teams program formalized under the Office of Global Service.

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WHERE MY VOICE IS HEARD SMALL

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORAL ROBERTS' TELEVISION MINISTRY¹

JIM ERNEST HUNTER, JR.

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Key Words *Oral Roberts, television, televangelist, Christian television, healing, City of Faith, Oral Roberts University*

Abstract

Oral Roberts was a pioneer in the development of Christian television. This study traces the development of Oral Roberts' television ministry from the early days of 1950s televised healing crusades, through the 1970s prime-time variety shows, and his later broadcasts that supported the various ministry endeavors, such as Oral Roberts University and the City of Faith.

Introduction

According to his biographer, David Harrell, Oral Roberts “has influenced the course of modern Christianity as profoundly as any American religious leader.”² A major factor contributing to Roberts' stature in the American religious community was his pioneering effort in the field of television revivalism. Oral Roberts moved to Tulsa from Enid, Oklahoma, in 1947 and began his evangelistic healing ministry. By the mid-1950s he was “the most advertised and ‘successful’ evangelist and spiritual healer” of the era.³ But it was Roberts' use of the medium of television that made him a household name and “prepared the way

for the modern electronic church.”⁴ Bill Leonard describes Roberts as “the theological and technological chameleon of the electric church.”⁵ Over his forty-year television career, Roberts frequently reshaped his television ministry in an effort to appeal to a wider audience. His ability to adapt to changing trends, times, and tastes assured him a place of national religious prominence for nearly forty years. Roberts’ television enterprise was highly influential upon other religious broadcasters, particularly Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker, and Paul Crouch, the heads of the three major Christian television networks.

This study will trace the historical development of Oral Roberts’ television enterprise through three stages. First, it will explore the Crusade Broadcast Era (1952–1967), in which Roberts used television to expand the reach of his crusade ministry through televising his tent crusades. Next, it will explore the Prime-Time Era (1969–1977), in which Roberts revolutionized religious broadcasting by creating a religious variety show featuring celebrity guest stars. Finally, it will explore the Roberts Family Broadcast Era (1977–1985), in which Roberts shifted to programing centered on highlighting ministry projects as well as deeper revelations concerning the lives of Roberts and his family.

Crusade Broadcast Era (1952–1967)

Oral Roberts moved to Tulsa from Enid, Oklahoma, in 1947 and began his evangelistic healing ministry. During this era, television was becoming more and more common in American homes. Roberts saw television as a potential new medium he could leverage on behalf of his ministry much in the same way he had success with his radio ministry, which was heard on over one hundred American radio stations. Roberts’ move toward television was in large part through the efforts of Lee Braxton, a North Carolina businessman who had become a close associate of Roberts in 1949.⁶ Their goal was to have his television program on fifty television stations, knowing full well that the costs could be upwards of one million dollars per year.

Oral Roberts first disclosed to his ministry partners the possibility of going on television in January 1952.⁷ His first attempt at television

was a short film titled *Venture into Faith*, intended primarily for viewing in local churches to promote his crusade ministry. The film was first shown in Portland, Oregon, in September 1952 and was distributed throughout the United States and many foreign countries. Roberts promoted the film as the “World’s First Bible Deliverance Picture.”⁸ By 1954, Roberts claimed “thousands have been converted while watching it.”⁹ The success of *Venture into Faith* only increased Roberts’ desire to develop a more extensive television ministry.

In December 1953, Roberts announced boldly to his partners, “God wants me on TV,” and that he was launching a new television broadcast called *Your Faith Is Power*, which he believed would “win a minimum of 7,150 souls each program.” Roberts had known for at least three years that his “gospel of deliverance must be preached on television” and believed that it could be “the greatest single means of preaching the gospel to the unsaved of this generation.”¹¹ He had promised his partners that his television broadcasts would resemble as nearly as possible his ministry in the tent crusades.¹² On January 10, 1954, the *Your Faith Is Power* program premiered on sixteen television stations. The program included a segment of testimonies, a twenty-minute sermon, an invitation for salvation, and a time of prayer for the sick where he asked the sick to place their hands on their bodies for receiving deliverance.¹³ It was here where Roberts first implemented his signature method of having viewers touch their TV screens as a “point of contact” to release their faith to God.¹⁴ Roberts was pleased with the initial result, reporting that the program “greatly increased the number being saved.”¹⁵ He believed that his supporters were “actors in the drama of the end-time” who “must not fail the unsaved of our generation.”¹⁶ The tremendous success of the program was a major factor in the million-soul campaign.¹⁷

The new television program was an early success, but Roberts was not entirely satisfied with the format and announced in June 1954 that he would begin televising his actual tent crusades.¹⁸ His longtime friend, Rex Humbard, encouraged him to take on the hard task of moving toward filming inside the tent. To fund this new and expensive ministry outreach, Roberts developed a fundraising technique that was to become an enduring feature of the Oral Roberts ministry called “The

Blessing Pact.” Roberts challenged 420 persons to give one hundred dollars each and promised he would pray that God would return the gift to each person “from a totally unexpected source.” Roberts vowed further to return the money after a year “if God has not blessed.”¹⁹ With the necessary funds and equipment secured, Roberts began filming and airing his crusades February 6, 1955, on sixty-one television stations.²⁰ For the first time, many Americans experienced the “the excitement and spiritual anticipation of a Pentecostal healing revival.”²¹ Roberts recalled that his broadcasts “hit the nation like a bombshell.”²²

The new broadcasts immediately generated an increased amount of national publicity for Roberts’ ministry, but not all of it was favorable. W. E. Mann applauded the “Supersalesman of Faith Healing” for his “skill in using television” to increase his following.²³ An editorial in *The Christian Century* referred to Roberts’ television success as “sensational” and expressed the opinion that Roberts’ broadcasts “can do the cause of vital religion far more harm” than any previous religious broadcasts.²⁴ The editorial regretted that there was “nothing on the air or on television to offset this travesty on Christian teaching.”²⁵ Harland Lewis critically noted that Roberts’ evangelistic work could be “easily seen to be superficial.”²⁶ Not only were Roberts’ message and method the objects of criticism, but his right to broadcast was called into question. Jack Gould, television and radio critic of the *New York Times*, insisted that television programs that involved religious healing were “a matter of fundamental policy for the broadcasting industry.”²⁷ Gould questioned the wisdom of a television station’s religious programming standard being determined by one’s ability to purchase broadcast time.²⁸ Despite the public criticism and the inherent difficulties of filming in the tent, Roberts’ television broadcasts were an enormous success.²⁹

Roberts’ ministry avoided the financial difficulties many other evangelists experienced because of his innovative sponsorship plan whereby individuals could sponsor Roberts’ broadcasts in their own cities.³⁰ The response to the programs “quickly turned television into a financial asset rather than a liability.”³¹ Roberts interpreted the success of his television ministry as God’s affirmation of his broadcasting enterprise. In the nine months following his February 1955 debut, the number of conversions resulting from his ministry had more than

doubled. Roberts became even more convinced that television was “the greatest and most effective instrument ever devised for reaching the masses.”³² Because of television’s inherent power to “communicate to the human being,” Roberts was certain that Jesus would include radio and television “if Jesus were on the earth today.”³³

The broadcasts of his tent crusades became a regular feature on American television stations throughout the late 1950s. Even though some Americans considered the experiences of the tent crusade to be excessive, Roberts’ meetings generally were models of decorum. Hysteria and emotionalism were not characteristics of Roberts’ services, though certainly his programs benefitted from certain editing capabilities.³⁴ Nevertheless, the “drama of the services is so great,” wrote G. H. Montgomery in 1956, that “in some beer gardens and taverns, where the service is viewed regularly, all sales are suspended during the Oral Roberts telecast.”³⁵

Television served another purpose for Oral Roberts in the 1950s besides the ability to proclaim his message to the greatest possible audience. The television programs provided Roberts’ followers with a continuing documentary of his ministry. Ministry supporters, or partners, were able to judge the validity both of Roberts’ ministry and of their continued support for that ministry.³⁶ Continued support was a major issue both for Roberts’ partners and for the Roberts organization. In February 1958, Roberts’ radio and television director Lee Braxton explained to ministry supporters that the broadcasts “are made by faith in God and confidence in our listeners, viewers, and readers.”³⁷ Braxton listed numerous radio and television stations that would be canceled if renewed financial support was not forthcoming. Support was crucial because Braxton was “convinced of the effect of the message of deliverance and prayers for the sick over radio and television.”³⁸ Braxton’s conviction and loyalty to Roberts’ ministry was such that he initiated his own version of the “Blessing Pact”; Braxton offered to repay from his personal finances any gift if the giver became dissatisfied with “the investment . . . made to help win souls.”³⁹

Braxton’s appeal for support perhaps was an early indication that Roberts’ television popularity was in decline.⁴⁰ The appeal also marked the beginning of an extended period of reevaluation and redefinition

of Roberts' television methodology and goals. While the format of Roberts' broadcasts essentially remained the same between 1958 and 1963, the ministry sought new audiences for its television message. In 1961 Roberts appealed for increased funding for his Japanese television outreach; his program, he claimed, was one of the three most watched in Japan.⁴¹

In many respects, television became a burden to Roberts early in the 1960s, particularly as he became more involved in the planning and development of Oral Roberts University. In the April 1964 issue of *Abundant Life*, Roberts wrote to his supporters to try to gage the impact of the television broadcast on their lives.⁴² Three months later the ministry announced a "departure" from the regular television format in order to broadcast programs that featured Roberts and his wife Evelyn discussing healing and interviewing persons who had been healed in previous Roberts crusades.⁴³ Although Roberts was dissatisfied with the new program, he reiterated that "television is one of the greatest instruments in projecting the gospel."⁴⁴ In April 1965 the Roberts ministry once again promoted a new television format that it called "a refreshing and dynamic documentary program of healing." The new broadcasts were to be taped before a live audience and include group discussions concerning healing.⁴⁵ The response to the programs was less than satisfactory. All along, he had "felt disenchanted" with the quality of his programs and by 1965 he had decided to terminate his television ministry no later than 1967.⁴⁶ Roberts' last appearance in a tent crusade occurred in 1967 in Anaheim, California. The tent "was ceasing to be an asset," Roberts maintained, because persons "had become used to cushioned chairs and air-conditioning and to watching television."⁴⁷

Roberts gradually removed his program from stations until May 1967. At the time, he offered little explanation to his partners for his action.⁴⁸ Only later did Roberts identify three factors in his decision to leave television in 1967. First, he insisted that he "refused to marry any method" and believed his television ministry was "outdated." Second, he was now fully committed to Oral Roberts University, which "was in its birth stages," and simply did not have time to get "involved in a totally new television ministry."⁵⁰ Finally, Roberts was interested in using ORU and his World Action program to focus more on global

evangelism efforts.⁵¹ By 1967, Roberts had abandoned both his television and his crusade evangelism. This shift marked the end of an era in the identity of Oral Roberts and his ministry.

The Prime-Time Era (1969–1977)

The two years following his departure from television Roberts spent time reevaluating his life and career. One significant event in Roberts' life that led to his return to television was his controversial decision to join the United Methodist Church on April 7, 1968. Roberts had deliberated the merits of becoming a United Methodist since his attendance at the 1966 Berlin World Congress on Evangelism, where he “could see the openness in the historic denominations to this ministry.”⁵² But his decision had devastating consequences on his partners and his financial base. Oral Roberts Evangelistic Ministries lost one-third of its partners and one-third of its financial support.⁵³ Roberts admits the reaction to his decision was “far and above anything I had imagined.”⁵⁴ The need to return to television suddenly became acute and Roberts recognized how important his television ministry was as a means of publicity and renewed financial support.

For several months, Roberts wrestled with how to design and implement a new format for his return to television broadcasting. He believed that the greatest way to reach “unchurched” persons was to reach out to the 190,000,000 Americans who watched television.⁵⁵ Roberts informed his partners of a new television venture in February 1969, explaining his willingness “to use new forms and new methods to reach the people.”⁵⁶ He turned to his friend Ralph Carmichael to help him make his “vision” a reality.⁵⁷ Carmichael was a brilliant artist who assembled a top notch artistic team to produce a new weekly television series and quarterly prime-time entertainment specials.⁵⁸ The first special, Roberts noted, featured musical presentations by guest star Mahalia Jackson, his son Richard, and an Oral Roberts University student group called the World Action Singers.⁵⁹ Roberts' sermon dealt with America's racial conflict and was entitled “Touching People.”⁶⁰ Roberts agreed with observers who believed the special was “the first religious program of its kind.”⁶¹

Roberts' television specials marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Oral Roberts' television ministry. Observers said Roberts' television specials resembled a religious "variety show" in which "celebrities from the 'worldly' show business industry, together with a culture-affirming interracial group of student entertainers from his own university who dance as well as sing."⁶² Ben Armstrong, the president of the National Religious Broadcasters, commented, "the new TV presentation had everything that would guarantee success for any series—bright contemporary music, attractive young people, a fast pace, superb technical quality, and a well-known personality at its center."⁶³ Even critic James Morris acknowledged Roberts' ability to "skillfully blend religion with musical entertainment."⁶⁴ The variety show format enabled Roberts to fulfill his desire to preach to "the millions who don't know Jesus," many of whom were attracted to his broadcasts by his numerous guest stars.⁶⁵

Not everyone was pleased with his new show. Some of Roberts' traditional conservative supporters complained about the "worldly" appeal of the new show. For his supporters who were uncomfortable with the concept of his television specials, Roberts developed a weekly Sunday morning series that was intended to be a more "traditional type of program." The Sunday morning broadcast, however, also included musical entertainment. Roberts made no apology for his inventive television ministry. In an interview with television talk show host Mike Douglas, Roberts defended his television broadcasts by declaring, "we have to go where the people are." William Willimon reported his conversation with a woman who disdained Roberts' past "healing routine," but appreciated the "new Roberts" as "one of the greatest religious leaders in our nation." Roberts' ability to communicate was never more apparent than in his television sermons and prayers; persons believed him when he promised, "every time I'm on that TV screen I'm speaking directly to you . . . and to your needs." Roberts even adopted a nationalistic motif as a factor in his personal motivation concerning his ministry. He was angry that Americans were "letting the devil lead them astray, and into bondage to sin and fear and evil spirits."⁶⁶

Oral Roberts' television productions were received enthusiastically by the broadcast industry. His 1971 Valentine's Day special was

honored with Emmy nominations in three categories.⁶⁷ The specials appeared on over 400 stations in 1972. In 1974, the largest audience ever to assemble at Emory University for its “Minister’s Week” did so to hear Roberts.⁶⁹ Time magazine noted “the fast-paced, free-spending ambiance of [Roberts’] television tapings, his casual, almost paternal confidence with his guest stars.”⁷⁰ Roberts had become the acknowledged leader among television revivalists and in the American Charismatic Movement. In every respect, Roberts’ 1969 decision to return to television was an enormous success. In 1973 Roberts disclosed that his organization was “four times the size that we were . . . our mail has quadrupled . . . our income has tripled, and I would say our influence is far greater.”⁷¹ Oral Roberts’ assessment that his television concept “helped draw millions of viewers who would not ordinarily watch a religious TV show” was accurate.⁷²

One change in the Roberts television enterprise was the ever-increasing control that Roberts sought and achieved. Richard served as coordinator of the World Action Singers and was a featured soloist on numerous specials and Sunday morning programs. In a rare television appearance of the four Roberts children (Ronald, Rebecca, Roberta, and Richard), Richard referred to television as “a powerful twentieth-century missionary” and praised his father’s programs as a “bold contemporary way to present the Christ of the Now.”⁷³ Roberts’ ministry purchased four RCA color cameras late in 1972, an acquisition that enabled the ministry to film specials and the weekly programs on the campus of Oral Roberts University.⁷⁴ February 9, 1975, was “a new day for us on TV,” according to Roberts; the Sunday morning program received the new title *Oral Roberts and You*. Each half-hour telecast was taped in its entirety before a live audience.⁷⁵ On-campus productions were enhanced by the 1977 construction of a television studio adjacent to the Mabree Center arena on the campus of Oral Roberts University. The studio was “considered to be among the best in the country.”⁷⁶ Even though Roberts continued to produce prime-time specials until 1979, tragedies in the Roberts family beginning in 1977 represented the beginning of a new era in his television ministry.

The Roberts Family Broadcast Era (1977–1984)

The year 1977 was yet another turning point in the television ministry. This time it came about through numerous tragedies in the Roberts family. In February 1977, Oral's and Evelyn's daughter Rebecca and their son-in-law Marshall Nash died in a plane crash in Kansas. To add to the grief, in 1979 Richard Roberts was divorced from his wife Patti. Shortly after, tragedy struck again when Roberts' oldest son Ronald committed suicide in June 1982. In January 1984, the son of Richard and his new wife Lindsay died after living thirty-six hours.⁷⁷ This series of tragedies changed the way Roberts approached his television ministry.

Immediately following the plane crash that killed Rebecca and Marshall, Roberts became convinced that he and his wife should appear on television to share their grief with their partners. Though reluctant at first, Evelyn eventually consented and joined her husband for "one of the most remarkable programs in the long history of Roberts' television career."⁷⁸ Just two short weeks after their child's death, the Roberts family opened their hearts about the tragedy in what was described as a "visceral and emotional response to death."⁷⁹ David Harrell noted that "few could have been unmoved by the bravery of the couple as they struggled to speak, often weeping, reaffirming their faith in God."⁸⁰ The program was and remains a unique moment in the history of religious broadcasting.

In September 1977 Oral Roberts took a huge leap of faith and announced his intention to build the City of Faith Medical and Research Center. The City of Faith opened in November 1981 after Roberts had gained approval for the facility over the objections of many in the Tulsa medical and political communities. Roberts, never a despiser of medical science or of physicians, envisioned the City of Faith to be the embodiment of the two major forces in healing: prayer and medicine. His avowed goal was to make the City of Faith, consisting of a sixty-story clinic, a thirty-story hospital, and a twenty-story research center, the "Mayo Clinic of the Southwest."

Because of this monumental undertaking, the television broadcasts became the instrument by which Roberts could report on the ministry's progress and publicize his appeals for increased financial support.

While quarterly specials continued to be produced until 1979, even those telecasts included an increased amount of “ministry news.” One 1978 special consisted of an extensive portrayal of the thirty-one-year history of Oral Roberts’ ministry.⁸¹ One 1979 television broadcast was another significant turning point in Roberts’ television enterprise. On July 15, 1979, Roberts, in his terms, “swallowed his pride” and explained the extreme financial needs of his ministry. He also expressed to his audience the personal anguish he experienced from bearing the responsibility for his ministry’s continued success.⁸² Two weeks after the July 15 broadcast, fellow Tulsa revivalist Kenneth Hagin took up a substantial financial offering for the Roberts ministry at his annual Tulsa Campmeeting. Roberts perceived Hagin’s act as the beginning of a cooperative period between the two ministries, as well as a divine confirmation of his self-disclosure on the television broadcast.⁸³ The year 1979 was further disruptive for Oral Roberts with Richard and Patti Roberts’ divorce, and former Roberts associate Jerry Sholes published a highly publicized “insider’s report” on Oral Roberts’ ministry.⁸⁴

Between 1978 and 1981 figures from the television rating service Arbitron indicated that Oral Roberts’ television audience declined by nearly fifty percent.⁸⁵ The factors that led to the decline of Roberts’ television audience were numerous: frequent alterations in the television format, negative publicity concerning Roberts’ ministry, and the controversy that accompanied the construction of the City of Faith.⁸⁶ Rice University sociologist William Martin referred to Roberts’ financial appeals for the City of Faith as an “all-out beg-a-thon”; Martin is certain that “people got tired of that.”⁸⁷ Roberts’ friend Jenkin Lloyd Jones, editor of *The Tulsa Tribune*, agreed with Martin’s assessment, adding that “desperation has a way of producing stridency, and stridency diminishes appeal.”⁸⁸

Finding “God’s best” television format was difficult for Roberts during this era. In July 1979, Roberts announced a new twelve-week Sunday morning television series entitled *Oral Roberts Teaching the Bible*. The program included Roberts’ teaching of selected biblical passages, followed by discussions of that teaching with Richard and Evelyn Roberts.⁸⁹ Neither the teaching format nor the ministry report

format were particularly successful or well received. In February 1981, the Roberts organization first broadcast *Sunday Night Live with Oral Roberts*, an hour-long program featuring conversation and musical entertainment.⁹⁰ The conversational format simply did not work with Roberts' personality. Following his short-lived *Sunday Night Live* series, Roberts announced the return of the specials, which would be entitled *Celebration*. Roberts explained, "God wants these prime-time television specials."⁹¹ One regular feature of the new specials was "a family of puppets called the Fudge Family in dialogue with the Roberts family."⁹² Response to the puppets, and to the specials, was unsatisfactory: production was discontinued after three programs.⁹³

In 1982 and 1983 Roberts' television ministry reflected Roberts' personal return to and appreciation for his Pentecostal heritage. Roberts' organization provided Jim Bakker's PTL network with a series of programs called *Classic Tent Crusades*. The series featured taped segments from Roberts' 1950s crusades, along with Roberts' comments on events, particularly healings, from the crusades.⁹⁴ The weekly *Oral Roberts and You* program also adopted a new format; "new," however, consisted of an increase in preaching and singing. Roberts promised his viewers "old-fashioned, Bible-believing, seed-faith teaching."⁹⁵ In November 1983 the Sunday morning programs, bearing the new name *Expect a Miracle*, featured Oral and Richard Roberts conducting preaching and healing services with a "Crusade atmosphere." Changes in format were not the only means by which Roberts' ministry sought to increase its television audience. Roberts purchased broadcast time on Atlanta's WTBS, the so-called "Superstation," in December 1983.

In 1984, Oral Roberts' television ministry made its final transition from the past to the future in the person of Richard Roberts. The younger Roberts had played an active role in his father's television ministry since 1968, but in 1984 Richard Roberts was given equal "billing" with his father on the Sunday morning series.⁹⁷ A more significant event was the September 17, 1984, debut of the *Richard Roberts* show, a daily Christian talk show hosted by Richard Roberts and his wife, Lindsay. Richard Roberts described his broadcasts as an "hour-long program of music, ministry, and personal prayer"; he adopted the theme "God can turn it around in your life" for his program.⁹⁸ With the

success of the *Richard Roberts* show, the mantle passed from father to son in the Roberts family television enterprise.

Conclusion

The decline in Oral Roberts' television audience was due, in some respects, to the success of his own television ministry. Television revivalism had become an increasingly competitive field since Roberts' ascendancy in the 1970s; the Arbitron ratings service surveyed ninety national religious television programs in 1985.⁹⁹ A measure of Roberts' influence on television revivalism has been expressed in the television ministries of various Roberts "imitators." The analysis of a former Roberts associate is accurate, "In a way, Oral was too successful . . . he showed other people what a TV ministry can do."¹⁰⁰ This observation is a fitting portrayal of Oral Roberts' influence as a television revivalist. In 1955 an editorial in *The Christian Century* lamented the fact that Oral Roberts' television success would surely "sprout imitators." Not even Roberts could have estimated how many "imitators" would arise, all with the hope that they could match Roberts' television success. By 1985, there were ninety national religious television programs whose audiences were measured by the Arbitron ratings service, an increase of nearly fifty percent since 1977.

Roberts' own analysis of his television success was often summed up simply this way: "I have obeyed Jesus."¹⁰¹ Roberts was wildly successful at harnessing the power of television to create a following and to support the various ventures in faith he undertook. He was a master at adapting his methods and his message in order for his ministry to realize its full potential. His ability to adapt to changing trends, times, and tastes assured him a place of national religious prominence for nearly forty years. That ability manifested itself most often in Roberts' distinctive television ministry.

One of Roberts' most courageous steps toward implementing the "potential power of television" was his return to the medium in 1969 with his prime-time entertainment-oriented specials. Indeed, his return to television was perhaps the single most significant decision Roberts made since his ministry began in 1947. Roberts' return to television in

1969 also revolutionized television revivalism in general. Through his prime-time specials Roberts “took his healing message to Hollywood” and experienced freedom from what David Harrell calls “the Sunday morning religious ghetto.” Harrell is correct when he declares that “in many ways, the modern electronic church was born with the airing of Oral’s first special in March 1969.”¹⁰³

Roberts’ long television ministry earned him the distinction as a pioneer in television revivalism, but his television specials brought him recognition as an innovator in the field. The success of Roberts’ television specials served as an affirmation of Roberts’ more mature ministry and enhanced the respect he had earned at the 1966 Berlin Congress on Evangelism. The specials were also the reflection of Roberts’ desire to broaden his ministry, in a fashion similar to his 1968 decision to affiliate with the United Methodist Church. Roberts’ television ministry in the early 1970s was an ideal accompaniment to the growth and development of Oral Roberts University. Television attracted students and financial support for the university, while Roberts appeared before his television audience not just as a preacher, but as the founder and president of an accredited university. As noted previously, Roberts’ ministry experienced enormous growth in the years following the return to television. That growth made possible Roberts’ dreams of graduate schools and the construction of the City of Faith. Simply put, without the medium of television, there would be no Oral Roberts.



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Notes

1 This study was originally part of the third chapter of my dissertation, “Gathering of Sects: Revivalistic Pluralism in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1945–1985,” (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986).

- 2 David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), vii.
- 3 W. E. Mann, "What About Oral Roberts? Supersalesman of Faith Healing," *The Christian Century*, 5 September 1956, 1018.
- 4 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, vii–viii.
- 5 Bill J. Leonard, "The Electric Church: An Interpretive Essay," *Review and Expositor* 81 (Winter 1984), 50.
- 6 Lee Braxton, "I Followed Oral Roberts Across America," *Healing Waters*, December 1949, 4.
- 7 G. H. Montgomery, "Looking Forward with Oral Roberts," *Healing Waters*, January 1952, 13.
- 8 "Venture into Faith," *Healing Waters*, August 1952, 9. The film was based on the story of a child stricken by tuberculosis whose at first reluctant parents out of desperation attend an Oral Roberts campaign and the boy is healed. The parents are also saved in the process. Like Roberts, the boy experiences healing but does not immediately recover his strength, which causes him to question his healing. Roberts makes a surprise visit to the boy's home to reassure him that his healing is real and that he can stand in faith.
- 9 Oral Roberts, "My Plans for Television," *America's Healing Magazine*, January 1954, 12.
- 10 Oral Roberts, "Your Faith Is Power," *America's Healing Magazine*, December 1953, 17.
- 11 Roberts, "Your Faith Is Power," 17.
- 12 Roberts, "My Plans," 12; cf. Oral Roberts, "A Call to Action," *America's Healing Magazine*, June 1954, 12.
- 13 G. H. Montgomery, "The March of Deliverance: Previewing the Oral Roberts TV Programs," *America's Healing Magazine*, January 1954, 4.
- 14 Roberts, "Your Faith Is Power," 17.
- 15 Oral Roberts, "Report on the Million Soul Crusade," *America's Healing Magazine*, March 1954, 9.
- 16 Roberts, "My Plans," 14.
- 17 Montgomery, "Previewing the Oral Roberts TV Programs," 4.
- 18 Roberts, "Call to Action," 12; Roberts recalled later that the early programs "had a woodenness about them that was stifling." See Oral Roberts, *The Call: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday), 178.
- 19 Roberts, *The Call*, 178–79. Only two persons later asked that their money be returned.
- 20 Lee Braxton, "Millions See the First Oral Roberts Telecast," *America's Healing Magazine*, March 1955, 22.
- 21 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 127.
- 22 "Oral Roberts Shares His Heart," *Charisma*, June 1985, 60.

- 23 Mann, "What About Oral Roberts? Supersalesman of Faith Healing," 1018.
- 24 "Oklahoma Faith-Healer Draws a Following," *The Christian Century*, 29 June 1955, 750. The editorial recalled that Liston Pope, dean of the Yale Divinity School, had previously criticized various religious television programs. The editorial insisted, "Oral Roberts . . . can do the cause of vital religion far more harm than can the insipid programs which drew his [Pope's] fire."
- 25 "Oklahoma Faith-Healer," 750.
- 26 Harland G. Lewis, "What About Oral Roberts? Implications for the Churches," *The Christian Century*, 5 September 1956, 1019.
- 27 James Morris, *The Preachers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 94.
- 28 Morris, *The Preachers*, 94.
- 29 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 96–97. One problem in particular was the slower pace of Roberts' healing line, where persons passed by for his touch and prayer.
- 30 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 129; cf. Roberts' detailed explanations of differing costs in various cities in "My Plans," 12–14, and "Call to Action," 12–13.
- 31 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 129.
- 32 Oral Roberts, "A Special Word about Television in the U.S.," *America's Healing Magazine*, October 1955, 17.
- 33 Roberts, "A Special Word," 17.
- 34 Opinion formed from viewing numerous videotapes of 1950s broadcasts, including Detroit, Michigan, and Pensacola, Florida, crusades.
- 35 G. H. Montgomery, "Television Follows Him Around the World," *Abundant Life*, July 1956, 10.
- 36 Montgomery, "Television Follows Him," 10.
- 37 Lee Braxton, "Radio and Television," *Abundant Life*, February 1958, 26.
- 38 Braxton, "Radio and Television," 26.
- 39 Braxton, "Radio and Television," 26.
- 40 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 172–73. Further, Roberts was criticized much less frequently when, in Harrell's terms, "the novelty of Oral's programs wore off."
- 41 "The Healing Power of Christ in the Orient," *Abundant Life*, March 1961, 5.
- 42 *Abundant Life*, April 1964, 23.
- 43 "A Look at Healing," *Abundant Life*, July 1964, 2.
- 44 *Abundant Life*, March 1965, 23.
- 45 "New TV Program," *Abundant Life*, April 1965, 22.
- 46 Roberts, *The Call*, 185–86.
- 47 Roberts, *The Call*, 174–75.
- 48 This opinion is based on the analysis of *Abundant Life* magazine from 1965 to 1967.
- 49 Roberts, *The Call*, 186.

- 50 Roberts, *The Call*, 186.
- 51 Oral Roberts, “We Are Returning to Television!” *Abundant Life*, February 1969, 3. World Action was an outreach ministry with substantial student involvement.
- 52 Roberts, *The Call*, 131; for an extensive account of Roberts’ experiences in Berlin, see Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 199–206.
- 53 Bob Goodwin, “Inside the Mind of Oral Roberts,” *Oklahoma Eagle*, October 25, 1973, n.p.
- 54 Roberts, *The Call*, 136.
- 55 Oral Roberts, “Yes, We’re Back on Television,” *Abundant Life*, March 1969, 3, comments, “A whole new generation has come up not knowing God, spitting on the church, and the government, and even on one another. They are truly sick, out of harmony with God and their real selves—which is often what sickness really is.”
- 56 Roberts, “Returning,” 6.
- 57 Oral Roberts, *Twelve Greatest Miracles of My Ministry* (Tulsa: Pinoak Publications, 1971), 91. Roberts described Carmichael as “a godly producer and . . . a Christian who was a great music arranger and orchestra [sic] leader.”
- 58 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 267.
- 59 Roberts, “Returning,” 4–5.
- 60 Roberts, *The Call*, 194.
- 61 Roberts, “Returning,” 3.
- 62 Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics* (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1983), 109; cf. Leonard, “The Electric Church,” 51.
- 63 Ben Armstrong, *The Electric Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979), 86.
- 64 Morris, *The Preachers*, 59.
- 65 Roberts, “Yes, We’re Back,” 2; Roberts’ guest stars included Mahalia Jackson, Pat Boone, Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, Anita Bryant, Agnes Moorehead, Shari Lewis, Lou Rawls, Jerry Lewis, Sarah Vaughan, Jimmie Rodgers, Jimmy Durante, Bobby Goldsboro, Andrae Crouch, Burl Ives, Della Reese, Johnny Mathis, Roy Clark, Skeeter Davis, Pearl Bailey, Johnny Cash, William Daniels, The Lennon Sisters, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Charley Pride, Florence Henderson, Lynn Anderson, Robert Goulet, Natalie Cole, Vikki Carr, Mel Tillis, and Minnie Pearl. Specials were filmed on location at Japan’s Expo 70, as well as in Alaska, London, and Grandfather Mountain, and North Carolina.
- 66 Roberts, “Yes, We’re Back,” 2–3.
- 67 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 269–70.
- 68 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 210.
- 69 William Willimon, “Oral Roberts Goes Legitimate,” *Theology Today* 33 (October 1976), 279.
- 70 “Oral’s Progress,” *Time*, 7 February 1972, 62.

- 71 Bob Goodwin, "Inside the Mind of Oral Roberts," *Oklahoma Eagle*, 25 October 1973, n.p.
- 72 "Going Back on National Television," *Abundant Life*, May 1974, 8.
- 73 Richard Roberts, "Television—Our Greatest Outreach to Meet People's Needs in 25 Years of Abundant Life Ministry!" *Abundant Life*, November 1972, 6.
- 74 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 271.
- 75 Oral Roberts, "February 9th Was a New Day for Us on Television," *Abundant Life*, March 1975, 2.
- 76 Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swann, *Prime Time Preachers: The Rising Power of Televangelism* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1981), 23.
- 77 Oral Roberts, "A Minister's Son Ends His Life," *Christianity Today*, 16 July 1982, 40.
- 78 Richard Roberts, *He's the God of a Second Chance!* (Tulsa: [n. pub.], 1985).
- 79 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 331.
- 80 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 332.
- 81 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 332.
- 82 "Oral Roberts' History Is Now," *Abundant Life*, June 1978, 11.
- 83 Oral Roberts, "Here Are the 7 Things God Is Saying to Me," *Abundant Life*, September 1979, 2.
- 84 Oral Roberts, "The Night I Found That God Hadn't Forgotten Me in Our Struggle," *Abundant Life*, October 1979, 5–13.
- 85 See Jerry Sholes, *Give Me That Prime-Time Religion* ([n.p.]: Oklahoma Book Publishing, 1979).
- 86 William F. Fore, "A Critical Eye on Televangelism," *The Christian Century*, 23 September 1981, 940.
- 87 Hadden and Swann, *Prime Time Preachers*, 57–58.
- 88 "Roberts Faces New Challenges on the Televangelist Front," *The Tulsa Tribune*, 5 February 1986, sec. B, 5.
- 89 Jenkin Lloyd Jones, "Oral Roberts' Troubles (Editorial)," *The Tulsa Tribune*, 10 July 1984, n.p.
- 90 "Oral Roberts Teaching the Bible," *Abundant Life*, August 1979, 5, 7, 23.
- 91 "Sunday Night Live with Oral Roberts," *Abundant Life*, February 1981, 14. The program was shown live throughout the United States through satellite capabilities.
- 92 Oral Roberts, "Why Prime Time," *Abundant Life*, December 1981, 16.
- 93 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 399.
- 94 Roberts still drew well-known guest stars to his *Celebration* specials, including Barbara Mandrell, Louise Mandrell, Stephanie Mills, T. G. Sheppard, and Teddy Pendergrass.
- 95 "Why the New TV Format," *Abundant Life*, July 1982, 11.

- 96 “Why the New TV Format,” 10, and “Oral Roberts and You,” *Abundant Life*, August 1982, 7.
- 97 *Abundant Life*, November 1983, 2.
- 98 “‘Expect A Miracle’ with Oral and Richard Roberts,” *Abundant Life*, January 1984, 20.
- 99 Richard Roberts, “I’m Committed to Doing a Daily TV Show That Shows You Can Turn It around in Your Life,” *Abundant Life*, January 1985, 13; cf. “A Candid Look Behind the Scenes of the Richard Roberts Television Program,” *Abundant Life*, June–July 1985, 11; Richard Roberts, *Second Chance*, 83.
- 100 “Roberts Faces New Challenges,” *The Tulsa Tribune*, sec. B, 5.
- 101 “Roberts Faces New Challenges.”
- 102 “Oral Roberts Shares His Heart,” 56.
- 103 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, viii.
- 104 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 210.

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Abstract

Oral Roberts' life and healing ministry were shaped by his theology of God. Roberts viewed God as good, who personally worked in the lives of people in the present, and who had good plans for each believer. The manifestation of these plans depended, however, on the faith of the individual believer. God was affected by events in time, was limited in his ability to act by the cooperation of the believer, and suffered emotional distress even as people do. The overriding element in all of Roberts' message is that "Something good is going to happen to you." Christians should expect miracles, good things, prosperity, healing, and overall blessings because God intends for his children to live that way in their journeys through life. This study will look at the theology of Oral Roberts, primarily featured in several of his most notable theological concepts.

Introduction

For the last century, Oral Roberts has been one of the most influential voices in the Spirit-empowered movement. For over four decades, Oral Roberts preached a gospel message of salvation and

healing through faith in Jesus Christ. However, little has been developed that identifies a foundational understanding of Roberts' basic Christian theology. This article will explore Oral Roberts' understanding of the nature of God, the reality of Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit found in some of his core writings. The investigation will identify the basic theological concepts he expressed throughout his books. The seeds of this study began in the late 1990s when I and a number of other theology faculty members at Oral Roberts University (ORU) met with then-President Richard Roberts to develop a textbook for the "Christian Faith and Ministry" class based on the teachings of Oral Roberts.¹ The text sought to present a systematic theology with supplemental teachings by Oral Roberts primarily found in his commentary on the New Testament published in 1984, something no one had done before.²

Oral Roberts was a gifted thinker, but his writings were mostly written at a popular level. However, Roberts did engage in reflecting on theological topics. Some of the theological concepts, like the Trinity, were quite traditional and were familiar to most American Christians. Other elements of his theology were radically new concepts such as "seed-faith" and his theology of healing. In all his published material, Roberts remained remarkably consistent with his message that "God is a good God" who is interested in doing good things in people's lives.

This study will look at the theology of Oral Roberts, primarily featured in several of his most notable theological concepts. In its most basic form, theology (*theos*, God, and *logos*, ideas) is simply articulating ideas about God. As Richard Kerney has pointed out, theology is simply the exercising of the imagination in order to construct a concept of God.³ This means that when we imagine God, we are creating theological pictures about his nature. This is something Oral Roberts understood keenly. He was not just out to preach a new gospel of salvation and healing. He was interested in correcting faulty images of God he experienced in his day that portrayed God as at a minimum indifferent to the people's suffering, if not the primary cause of suffering.⁴ In order to change this narrative, Roberts developed a number of theological ideas about God that he communicated through memorable phrases, such as, "God is a good God," "Expect a miracle," and "God is able!"⁵ These ideas were central to Oral Roberts' theology and shaped his concept of God.

“God Is a Good God”

Oral Roberts’ theology can best be encapsulated by one phrase: “God is a good God.”⁶ Crowds flocked to Roberts’ tent crusades because they were experiencing brokenness in their minds, spirits, or bodies, and they knew that Roberts proclaimed a God that was good and who wanted to save and heal people. Roberts saw himself as a “spiritual cheerleader” who sought to inspire the thousands who came to hear him preach a gospel that proclaimed God’s goodness to every area of life. He encouraged people to put their faith in a God who loved them and who was not only able, but willing to do miracles on their behalf. During his own experience of sickness, believers around him were telling him that God had put his sickness upon him.⁷ The pain of this experience led him to seek out another picture of God, which he found in 1947 when “God began to bust my theology wide open.”⁸ His picture of God changed when he read 3 John 2, “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospers” (KJV). Roberts declared,

This showed me that God was a good God and the devil was a bad devil. There is no badness in God and no goodness in the devil. God is totally good and the devil is totally bad. For the first time in my life I had a real foundation for my faith. My thinking was straightened out. I could come to God and believe Him as He really is. No longer would I be tormented by questions about God’s goodness, His love, and His purpose. When I looked upon a suffering man, I would not have to question myself about its being God’s will for him to be sick or to be beaten down by the wicked devil.⁹

From that point on, Roberts rejected the notion that sin, sickness, and calamity were the result of God, not because the Scripture had changed, but because his theology or concept of God changed. If God was truly good, then he could confidently proclaim: “Something good is going to happen to you.” In all aspects of Roberts’ theology, he viewed God as good, who personally worked in the lives of people in the present, and

who had good plans for each believer.

For Roberts, God's goodness was inexorably connected to his love, which was the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He commented,

When I think about God, I think about love. God is love. That is why He gave Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, to die for our sins. He loves you and me. In fact, God loves us first. He loves everybody before they love Him. And He even loves those who do not love Him. Therefore when we have God who is love, we love others. And if we say we are of God but do not love others, we really are liars. Love is the surest sign that God is in our lives.¹⁰

Only through his theology of God could he make room for the possibility for Christians to believe for miracles, good things, prosperity, healing, and overall blessings.

The “Dimensions” of the Trinity

Roberts' concept of God as Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, followed traditional ideas of three Persons in one God, without defining the idea. Most western Christians envision God as one being, Jesus another, and the Holy Spirit as some incorporeal, mystical, spiritual substance. The western scientific mind tends to view numbers separately and often has great difficulty thinking that one could equal three. However, Roberts does not try to resolve this dilemma. He does, however, describe the Trinity in terms of “dimensions.” In his commentary on Matthew 3:16–17, he describes the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit thus:

God had said to the Hebrews, “Oh, Israel, the Lord thy God is One.” Our Jewish friends say today, “How then is God three?” God is One, but He manifests Himself in the dimensions of His fatherhood, of His spirit, and of His Son, in ways that people can understand who He is.¹¹

“Dimension” could be used to mean “extent” or “scope,” referring to locations, realms, or aspects of existence in relation to other ones. But, Roberts does not intend to describe the measurements of God nor his scope of influence. Rather, he uses this term to try to differentiate the Trinity without losing the element of unity of Being.

Concerning the concept of the Trinity, Roberts did focus his understanding of God on one particular person, whether Father or Son or Holy Spirit. Adhering to the broader Protestant Trinitarian tradition, Roberts differentiated persons or “dimensions” of God in terms of the relationship to the individual: the Father as Creator, Jesus as the Savior who died on the Cross for our sins, and the Holy Spirit as the one who inspires and convicts people of sins. In his commentary on the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:16–17, he says,

Here we see the incarnation of God coming by His Spirit. First, God the Son, the everlasting God who created the world, then the Holy Spirit who is everlasting God, who conceived the human body of the Son and who had co-existed with the Father from the beginning. We must understand that Mary bore His humanity but not the Christ part of Jesus. The Christ part was conceived by the Holy Spirit and co-existed with Father from the beginning. In the mystery of the Incarnation, God is becoming flesh and flesh is becoming God. He is total God and total man—God, who is eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and man that He might reflect what God is like. Jesus says in John 14 that “If you see Me, you have seen the Father.”¹²

Roberts believed that God’s true nature was revealed in Jesus, who demonstrated what God was like so people could understand him better. This allowed people to identify better with God through the humanity of Jesus as a real person, living in a real place, doing things that most people do. Roberts was pushing back against the view that God was primarily transcendent, instead offering a more intimate portrayal of a God who wants to have a daily relationship. Roberts witnessed the physical, financial, and spiritual brokenness of people

in his ministry and sought to bring them deliverance by getting them “connected” with God in a noticeable reality. Only through a “real” relationship with God can people live an “abundant life,” only if people remained connected to their Savior.

Roberts’ concept of Christology was also very balanced. Although Jesus was fully God, he was very human. One way this was demonstrated was in Jesus’ miracles, which were supernatural. Roberts believed in a universe that was not closed, but one in which God works within the system he created. Historically understood, miracles have been thought of as the work of God superseding normal natural physical functions. However, Jesus’ miracles of healing do not involve the conveyance of non-natural material. For example, a broken arm is healed instantly by Jesus, not by inserting a titanium replacement, rather by healing the person’s natural flesh and bone. What was “miraculous” was the speed at which the arm healed, or in the case of disease, like the woman with the issue of blood, the power of God quickly made the woman’s body overcome the elements that had malfunctioned and made it return to normal function.

The humanness of Christ also meant that he was not only aware of human weakness and suffering, but he made it his mission to meet the physical and spiritual needs of believers, thus revealing the nature of God.

Do you want to know what God is like? Of course. Everyone wants to know what God is like. But that has been the problem . . . That is why Jesus came. He came not only to save us through His death on Calvary, but He came to let us see Him through the Bible, to see His deeds, the places He went, the things He said, the miracles He wrought, the life He lived, the death He died, the resurrection He had, His ascension, descent of the Holy Spirit, His living with us in His unlimited presence. Then we see the Father. You see, because Jesus is good, we see that God is good. Until we read Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the book of Acts—particularly those five books—we are not going to see Jesus, and in not seeing Jesus, we will not know what the Father is like.¹³

Despite his anthropocentric view of Jesus, Roberts did not fall into the trap of seeing Jesus as a “good buddy” or simply a special human. Roberts sees Jesus in more relational terms, as the guide to a different understanding of God and spiritual things. God wants the heart of a person, not just a ritual or duty, though those are important aspects of religious life. The realm of the spiritual seems so transcendent to so many Christians that our Christian life takes on the appearance of legalism or rationalistic obedience to traditional practices. Roberts stressed the connection of Christians to the spiritual world through their relationship with Jesus. That was more important than denominational or sectarian identification.

The Holy Spirit

Roberts often spoke of the Holy Spirit, but mostly in terms of his role in the empowerment of the believer. Roberts understood that people are themselves weak and helpless in the face of life’s difficulties. Because of this, the Holy Spirit exercises his power to meet these needs and help people overcome the issues life produces. Roberts encouraged people to see beyond the physical world, to participate in the powerful spiritual realm of existence.

It is there, just beyond our natural eyesight that our faith connects with the unseen world which surrounds us, and in that supernatural realm we can use our faith to tap into the miracles that brought Jesus Christ into this earth as our Lord and Savior. It’s in the unseen realm where the Holy Spirit operates as the unlimited presence of Jesus and where the Lord Himself is now seated at the Father’s right hand. And in this invisible world, from which we’re separated only by the veil of our humanness, believers have access every moment to the miraculous—to the miracle life which our salvation from sin has bought for us! How can we penetrate the invisible and reach that supernatural realm of God? It’s by the power of His spirit.¹⁴

Roberts’ belief that there is a greater life in this physical realm means he was more of an existentialist than a Stoic. His theological

worldview recognizes the brokenness of human suffering and the need of help from divine sources. This notion is not so different from the concept held by other world religions, but in Roberts' view Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, actively makes himself available to create a personal relationship with each Christian, to guide, direct, touch, speak to, and manifest himself to all Christians. The Holy Spirit makes all this real and experiential. The entryway into this relationship is faith.

Practically everyone recognizes the fact of God's healing power. Mental acceptance is not enough. We must have personal, active faith in God for our own healing. If God has ever healed one person, He will heal two; if He heals two, He will heal four; if four, then eight; and if eight, He will heal all who will believe. Else you would make Him have healing compassion for one and not another. Should that be true, He would not be God, but a man . . . No, you will not be able to say it is God's will to heal one but it is not His will to heal another. He is either a God of love—perfect love—or He is not God at all.¹⁶

However, Roberts admitted that he did not see everyone he prayed for receive healing. God has his own timetable, showing his belief in God's ultimate sovereignty.¹⁷

Roberts knew that God made choices and created humans with the ability to choose between moral options, as well as choices of certain things in life such as food, clothing, shelter, friends, and so on. But God is still the Sustainer of the universe and there are some things that just have to happen, whether anyone likes it or not. God's choices do not always appear congenial with our ways of handling problems, such as directing punishments for disobedience, like the result of Dathan's pride or the Israelites who were put to death by Phineas. But there is the aspect of reverential fear due to God as Creator and Lord and Master. He certainly applies discipline in the ways that relate most appropriate for the people and historical age of the situation. Biblical examples of necessary events include Jonah's call to Nineveh, Paul's meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Joseph's residence in prison so he could meet Pharaoh, and Moses' assignment to return to Egypt. So we

conclude that sometimes we make choices and sometimes God has an irrefutable plan. Roberts believed that people failed to exercise faith, which is a choice, to believe in God and his word. So he felt called to encourage people to trust God and expect him to work in their lives.

Another concept that was essential to his theology of God was the concept of “the anointing” of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ Roberts used the concept of the anointing as a way to connect with his audience and to inspire confidence in God’s ability to meet their needs through the ministry and power of the Holy Spirit. But for Roberts, the anointing is not a mystical power, rather the presence of the Person of God himself.

The revelation came to me that the anointing is a time when God separates you from yourself and fills you with His glory so that when you speak it’s like God speaking and when you act it’s like God acting . . . you are keenly aware that another Self—the Spirit of God Himself—has taken over and is, at that time, in full charge of you and you are acting under His divine unction or guidance and power from above.²⁰

It was important for Roberts to counter the notion that there is an autonomous spiritual power that is called “the anointing.” Instead, he emphasized that the anointing is a gift of the Holy Spirit. He rightfully recognized that eight times in the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit himself is called “the gift” and the so-called “gifts of the Spirit” discussed in 1 Corinthians 12 are actually “graces” that are the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, as he deems appropriate (1 Cor 12:11). He consistently reminded people that Jesus does the miracle, not Oral Roberts. In a sense, we do not receive tools; we are the tools of God that he uses.²¹

“Turn Your Faith Loose”

Roberts believed that many Christians were living in despair because they assumed God did not have time to hear their prayers personally or care for their sufferings. This is where the concept of faith intersects with his concept of God. He says, “Many Christian people have been led to believe that God is not a good God—that He does not reward

faith. So why do you think God wants us to have faith? Because, He wants us to know His existence, His realness, His goodness, and His desire to reward.”²² Faith was the essential key to the connection between God and people. Roberts believed that God was willing and ready to release his goodness if one can simply “turn your faith loose.”²³ Faith is, therefore, a series of interchanges: we recognize our need, we interact with God through prayer made in faith, then God acts to supply the solution to our needs and problems. But the key was always faith.

Faith is right believing. Fear is wrong believing. Faith believes that God is the Sources of our total supply . . . that God is for us . . . that God wants us to be in total health—body, mind, spirit, relationships, finances—in other words your whole life . . . that God’s highest desire is to see our needs met, our questions answered, and our problems solved.²⁴

It is important to recognize that although God is a good God who desires to do miracles, the burden and responsibility for releasing those miracles falls directly on the believer.²⁵ Jesus is the receptacle full of healing power, but Christians must “release their faith,” like the woman with the issue of blood, to receive the power. “The knob on the door is on our side. We’ve got to open the door; then God will reveal His treasures to us.”²⁶

This was the key to living the “abundant life” that God, in his nature, had for believers. To access this life, the act of faith becomes the way to reach “higher” up than our current existence.

Oh, to get a miracle! To be rewarded for your faith by God!
To feel your faith leaping up to the sky, soaring up to God in
heaven! There’s nothing like it in the world! You’re transacting
spiritual business with the Almighty, unlocking His divine
intervention in your life. And as your spirit reaches up to a God
Whom you cannot see, the Lord Himself is reaching out His
hand to you with the prize, the reward, the deliverance, the
miracle you need. All the glory of heaven is waiting for you AT
THE OTHER END OF YOUR FAITH!²⁷

Roberts' rhetoric of the "higher" life describes the positive, but "lowest" and "down" communicates negative, defeated concepts.²⁸ Therefore, the life of faith was a higher reality in God, one described as experiencing the "abundant life" that can "change his way of life so he could use his faith to successfully meet the enemies of life."²⁹ On the other hand, if miracles depended on the believer's initiative, would it not be that someone did not receive deliverance or healing because faith had not been exercised? In one sense, this is true of Roberts, who believed his job was to focus his efforts on getting people to believe first so that God would then be able to do good things for them.

It is possible that Roberts' hermeneutic, as with all of us, was based primarily on his experience with God and his own ministry. He reasoned, if God heals one person, why would he not heal everyone, if one would only persevere? Roberts viewed theology from an American cultural perspective. God must be fair, and the believer must do something in connection with the situation, then rewards come from our trust in him.³⁰ Roberts' personal experience of healing illustrates his theology. God healed his stuttering and his case of tuberculosis, which proved to him that God loved him. Additionally, Roberts ran away from his home, rejected the teaching of his parents, turned his back on Jesus and Christian religion but was restored to normal health and righteous living as evidence of God's personal love for him. Since God does not play favorites, what he did for Roberts, he would do for everyone.³¹ The answer to every problem, the secret of interacting with the supernatural power of God, was the exercise of individual faith.³²

The challenge of Roberts' view, of course, is that each person is an individual with different circumstances and different relationships with God. In the same way that medicine will not affect everyone the same way, what is successful for one may not be successful for all. Having a low view of God's sovereignty often creates many theological problems because it tries to fit everything possible into a category, organized and controlled. Roberts' worldview included a cooperation with God. However, he was not quick to blame a lack of faith for people not getting healed. Instead, he pointed to the need for

perseverance, praying until the answer comes, as the major factor that indicated faith on the part of the believer. As an illustration, Roberts cited a case of the restoration of health for a young child named Benjamin, whose parents prayed for a long time for his healing:

He [God] wants us to stick with our praying until the answer comes! What if Wayne and Leslie had given up on day five? What if they had thrown up their hands in anguish and frustration and stopped praying for little Benjamin's healing? Or what if they had hung in there until the eighth day . . . or the eleventh day . . . or the twelfth day, but then had given up? Where would he be now? Oh, if he had died, he'd be with Jesus, but would that be what God had planned for his life? We've got to go the long distance no matter how long it takes!³⁴

In this case, Roberts seems to make even the healing contingent upon the prayers of his parents. However, the key to faith is simply to continue to believe, not the quality or condition of their faith.

Roberts wrestled with questions about the interplay between God and humanity and the limits of God's goodness to reach humanity. Roberts maintained a position that there is a synchronous partnership between God's will and the believer's faith in the healing process and he balanced God's design and interaction with humanity. For Roberts, since a human being is created "a free moral agent," God's action is affected, whether limited or released, by human action.³⁵ God exercises his sovereignty in guiding human historical events, but for individuals, some first steps from the believer are necessary. He notes that God is highly affected by human decisions, even being emotionally devastated when humans succumbed to evil influence. He comments,

Can you imagine the shattering impact that seeing these things (all the evil acts of fallen humanity, described in Genesis 6) must have had upon a good God whose dream was to have a family like Him to multiply and replenish the earth and to live in the class of God Himself? The scene was so devastating that

the council of the Godhead was immediately convened: and it repenteth the Lord that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him at his heart.³⁶

That said, even though he maintains this lower and anthropologically-centered view of God, he insists that “God is still God.”³⁷ He is still greater than the universe and has known the future of the world from the beginning and has planned the redemption and restoration of humanity in Christ from before the creation of the universe. Although confident in God’s goodness, Roberts often held these realities in tension: “I just believe that God is, that He is a good God, that He loves me, and that He has the power to deliver me. We must come by faith. If you could reason it out, you wouldn’t need to have faith. You have faith for that which you can’t understand.”³⁸

God Is Your Source

Another important concept of God, intimately connected to Roberts’ view of God, was the belief that “God is your source.” As an element of the expressed love of God for his people, Roberts viewed God as a Good Shepherd who provides for our every need. God, by his nature, is a giver. After all, God loved so much that he “gave” his son Jesus to provide for us. In the same way, believers can give unto God out of faith in his goodness and, in return, God will supply their needs, financially and otherwise. This view of God led Roberts to develop the idea of “seed-faith,” which became a major theme in many of his writings and messages. He explains, “You sow it, God will grow it, and you will reap it, providing you believe it and set your faith on God who calls Himself the Lord of the harvest . . . When He (God) speaks, and I obey, miracles happen.”³⁹

The basic idea of seed-faith originated through the combination of Roberts’ hermeneutic of reading the Bible as a personal message to himself and his upbringing as a child of the Great Depression in America. Just as a farmer plants wheat in order to get wheat, God planted the seed of his Son so that people would believe in him and

have everlasting life and not die. Out of this belief, Roberts developed the principle of seed-faith, which emphasized demonstrating faith by giving a seed. This involved three basic steps. First, seed-faith is making God the source of your life, the source of your total supply. Second, seed-faith is giving God your best, giving first, giving out of your need. And third, it is giving for the desired result, expecting a miracle harvest, expecting to receive it.⁴⁰

Our comprehension of this system was meant to produce a confidence, faith if you will, that because God loves us, He wants all our physical, mental, and spiritual needs met and He is the source of meeting those needs. Again, it is up to the individual person's exercise of faith that determines the extent of the supply. We essentially disappoint God's desires if we do not focus our relationship with God on His abilities to provide for us and cooperate with the spiritual principles involved. How does one connect with the spiritual power to activate this system? God's word to His people is that we must MAKE GOD OUR SOURCE God's people are not to live in poverty, physically, spiritually, or financially. God is in your now and you are in God's now. God has already provided everything we need for our lives and He is serious about our having our needs met. God wants us, as His children, to live every day of our lives "by faith."⁴¹

By imagining God as the source for abundant life, the intersection of the goodness of God with the faith of the individual created the potential that believers could "expect a miracle," even on a daily basis.⁴²

Conclusion

Oral Roberts' theology is intimately connected with his view of God. Roberts viewed God as good, who personally worked in the lives of people in the present, and who had good plans for each believer. He believed that all scriptures, such as 3 John 2, were direct quotations from God intended to reveal God's nature and his desire that every believer be in health and prosper. This conviction that "Something

Good Is Going to Happen to You” led him to proclaim that believers could expect miracles, good things, prosperity, healing, and overall blessings because God intends for his children to live that way in their journeys through life. It also meant that all the bad and difficult things come from the devil, from unbelief, or a failure to understand God’s true nature. At times, Roberts held a minimal view of God’s sovereignty in that he works to some extent in history, although he never expanded that notion in any detail. But it was his concept of faith that also shaped his view of God. Requirements, such as faith and obedience, limited God’s ability to work in the believer’s life. God was affected by events in time, was limited in his ability to act by the cooperation of the believer, and suffered emotional distress even as people do. Such a perspective necessarily places a large responsibility for the fulfillment of God’s purposes on the individual believer. In the end, Roberts’ theology was a theology of God, that believed God was good and was here to heal, restore, and bless his people, even as Roberts himself had been blessed. All one needs to do is to believe in this image of God and “expect a miracle.”

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24 Oral Roberts, *Fear Not! That's the Biggest Secret to Getting Your Miracle* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, 1989), 10.

25 Oral Roberts, *How Your Faith Works When God Says No!* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, 1992), 7, comments “God really believes in you! The real question is, do you believe in Him even when He says no to you? Are you aware that you have faith and that you can use your will to release your faith to God for every miracle you need and that your faith still works even when God says no?”

26 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 43.

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ORAL ROBERTS AND THE SPIRITUAL DNA OF ORAL ROBERTS UNIVERSITY¹

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Introduction

Recently, my wife Lisa and I decided to use Ancestry.com to check on the roots and origin of our DNA. Though we knew the test is not always absolutely accurate we were intrigued to discover more about who we are today by seeing where our DNA came from in the past. It was a fun exercise and I even discovered that I have some Jewish ancestors. DNA tracking is a growing science around the world as people seek to understand themselves by looking at their past. As I look at the history of Oral Roberts University (ORU), I see that much of the spiritual DNA of this institution came out of the ministry and life of Oral Roberts, to which this issue of *Spiritus* is dedicated. Although it is not uncommon to name a university after its founder, it is perhaps more rare for the founder to serve as the president, particularly with the longevity that Oral Roberts enjoyed in his thirty years leading ORU. Because of this, we continue to see the influence of Oral Roberts' spiritual DNA throughout ORU today. As President, on this centennial of Roberts' birthday, I want to look back on ORU's history and identify six aspects of Roberts' legacy that have influenced the DNA of ORU.

Think Big

At ORU, it is in our DNA to think big. Oral Roberts was a man who was ambitious for God. While riding in a car to Ada, Oklahoma, God spoke to a teenager suffering from tuberculosis named Granville Oral Roberts and said, “Son, I am going to heal you, and you are going to take my healing power to your generation. You are to build me a university, build it on my authority and the Holy Spirit.”² Not only was Roberts one of the most impactful ministers of the twentieth century, his story is one the great stories of modern Christianity.³ In his lifetime, Roberts went from a sick and stuttering kid living in an impoverished small-town Oklahoma family to a visionary leader with a calling to build a university that touched a whole generation through the power of God. He sought to dream God-sized dreams. He believed God for big things. You only need to walk around the campus of ORU and look at the buildings, or look across the street to the City of Faith that is now called Cityplex, to know that this man did not settle for small thinking or small things. He dreamed big dreams, faced big challenges, dealt with big opposition, and witnessed some big victories in his lifetime.

The idea that a healing evangelist would build a Spirit-empowered university was certainly a big idea in its day. It was unheard of for a Spirit-filled university be accredited at the highest levels and to play in Division I athletics. Yet today, a whole generation of students, faculty, staff, administration, and alumni are being blessed because Roberts was not afraid to dream big. He allowed the Holy Spirit to lift him out of the small thinking that surrounded him into thinking God-sized thoughts. From tents to TV studios, from housing facilities to a mega-hospital, Roberts did not think or act insignificantly. On his desk throughout the years, he had a little plaque that read, “Make No Little Plans Here.” It was a constant reminder to everyone who entered his office not to bring him little thoughts or ideas, but only those things big enough for the God of the universe. In fact, I have it on my desk even now to remind me of the legacy of this university. ORU is committed to helping our students dream big because, like our founder, we believe God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Eph 3:20, NKJV).

Through our cutting edge globalization initiatives and award-winning technological innovations like the Global Learning Center, ORU is racing ahead to the future and dreaming about how we can expand Spirit-empowered education to reach every inhabited continent.⁴ We are “Making No Little Plans Here” because it is in our DNA.

God Is Good

At ORU, we believe that God is a good God. Roberts’ famous saying, “Something good is going to happen to you,” was not just a television slogan; he believed it. It was a truth that he discovered while digging deep into the Scripture. As Roberts studied God’s word, he discovered 3 John 2, which reads, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (NKJV). This discovery revolutionized his concept of who God is. As Roberts said, “Third John became a battering ram that began to tear down the walls for a new theology!”⁵ He realized that God was not standing around trying to beat everyone up with a club, but God cared for people and wanted to do good to everyone. The teaching that God was good and wanted to bless his people was revolutionary in the 1940s and 1950s. But Roberts was able to convince his generation that God is a good God and he loves us.

At ORU, we still believe in a good God who wants to do good for his people. We have certainly seen his goodness in the progress made in the university over the past few years. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the first graduating class of ORU in 1968. We have seen nine straight years of growth in our student population. We have built new facilities. We have new degree programs, including a greatly expanded offering of online degrees, a doctorate in Nursing, and a new Ph.D. in Theology with an emphasis in Global Christianity. In the past ten years, over 4,000 students have received tuition help through the Whole Person Scholarship. The campus is spiritually alive and we are raising up a new generation of Spirit-empowered leaders. Even with the progress we have experienced, our continued sense is that our best days are ahead of us and not behind us. The work of our future graduates will exceed not only our founder’s, but also every previous generation of ORU staff and students. At ORU, the future is

bright and filled with amazing promise because God is a good God!

Healing Comes From God

At ORU, healing is in our DNA. This university was founded under the belief that all healing comes from God. Roberts' own healing from tuberculosis uniquely authorized him to tell others about the healing power of God. Roberts knew what it was like to be sick and what it felt like to have God's power flow through his body, healing him from tuberculosis and stuttering while raising him up to serve the Lord. Roberts began his healing ministry in 1947 while he was pastoring a small church in Enid, Oklahoma. In a time of searching, Roberts began to remember the promise God had made in the back of the car that he would take his healing power to his generation. He began to study over and over again the healing ministry of Jesus and the ministry of healing in the early church. Over a period of a few weeks, Roberts devoted himself to reading all of the Gospels and Acts on his knees three consecutive times. It was out of this season of study and seeking God that Roberts began to understand that God wanted to heal people. Whether it was through a point of contact or building a hospital, Roberts was passionate about the fact that God was the healer.

That legacy of healing is still in our DNA today. Standing at the front of our campus are two giant hands. Most people call them the "praying hands," but in Oral Roberts' mind they were healing hands. One hand represents prayer and the power of God to heal supernaturally and the other hand represents science and the surgeon's hand healing through medicine as one of God's healing gifts. They are combined to symbolize healing for the totality of human beings. As president, I can confidently say that at ORU we still believe that God is a healing God and he is using us to bring healing to the world.

The Holy Spirit Is Foundational

At ORU, it is in our DNA that the Holy Spirit is foundational to our university. Belief in the Holy Spirit was integral to the life and ministry of Oral Roberts. Roberts was a son of the Pentecostal movement and in

his lifetime he became a bridge between the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements.¹⁰ Roberts helped to create a new vocabulary helping new people embrace the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Roberts was deeply committed to the Spirit-filled life and various manifestations of the Spirit.¹¹ What is now a beautiful 263-acre campus with over twenty buildings was once a vacant pasture where Oral Roberts would walk the grounds praying in tongues and interpreting back to himself.¹² It is this legacy of dependence on the Holy Spirit in Roberts' life that built this university. All of the buildings, from the student dorms to the chapel, were designed and created through our founder praying in the Spirit.¹³ God told Roberts to build a university on his authority and on the Holy Spirit. This idea was new, different, and unique. There were many early battles and struggles around this philosophy as he sought to build a university that would do things differently.¹⁴ His concept of "whole person" education became a key to keeping the Spirit above the mind in ascendancy within this university. Roberts said,

I was told to build God a university, build it on His authority and on the Holy Spirit. That is why every leader and professor must know Christ as personal Savior and be filled with the Holy Spirit in the charismatic dimension of speaking in tongues. The Holy Spirit is to be the common denominator of all of ORU's founding, operation and future. The reason is that God created man in His own image and not a mere mind or physical being.¹⁵

We still believe this today at ORU. The Holy Spirit is under this university, around this university, and through this university. The presence of the Holy Spirit permeates our chapel services, empowers our faculty, and drives our mission. Just as the founder taught his "Holy Spirit in the Now" class to all his students, every year I teach a "Spirit-empowered Living" class for all our students in which I emphasize hearing God's voice. ORU was founded on the Holy Spirit. Every day we welcome the Holy Spirit amongst us. This is also the key factor that will ensure an awesome future at ORU. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life, the Spirit of truth, and the Spirit of prophecy. He will empower us to grow into the future with supernatural discernment and effectiveness.

Hearing and Obeying God

At ORU, hearing and obeying God's voice is in our DNA. Roberts believed in and practiced hearing God's voice no matter the personal cost. He believed that his assignment in this life was simply to obey what God had spoken to him. Nothing demonstrated his willingness to obey God's voice more than the building of ORU. The shift from healing evangelist to university president was not an easy one for people to understand. By the late 1950s, Roberts had become America's healing evangelist and people streamed to his crusades from everywhere. He personally laid his hands on and prayed for over one million people. His ministry was by all accounts a success and there were more than 700 employees at one time serving at his headquarters here in Tulsa. Therefore, when Roberts began to share his plan to build a university with the members of his team, not everyone was on board and some doubted that this was a good idea. A critical moment came when his twelve top associates asked for a meeting with Roberts to question him about his plans and what building a university might do to his healing ministry.¹⁶ After some discussion, one of the leaders plucked up the courage to tell Roberts why they had asked for the meeting. He said, "If you persist in building the university, all of us have decided to leave."¹⁷ This was a crisis moment. But Roberts did not flinch. He responded,

Despite what anyone may think or believe, God Himself called me to build Him a university, build it on His authority and the Holy Spirit. I am not leaving the healing ministry; it is my life. However, God does not operate in a vacuum. He is constantly moving forward and I have learned we must move with God. I have to obey God and start building Him a university, permeating every part of it with the divine principle that God is a healing God. I may fall on my face. I may fail. It may never fly, but I have to do it. If you leave me, it will break my heart. However, if I obey God as I intend to do, I know He will raise up another team to serve with me.¹⁹

After Roberts gave his speech, he left the room. A few hours later, all twelve senior leaders asked for another meeting. When Roberts came

into the room, they cried and hugged him. They said, “Oral, we had to know that it was God’s call on you to build the university. The only way we could know for sure that it was God was to bring things to a head. We’re not leaving. You lead and we’ll follow.”¹⁹

Oral Roberts committed himself not only to hearing God’s voice, but also to obeying his voice without compromise. He famously said, “If God tells me to jump through the wall, I jump. That’s my business. It’s His business to make the hole in the wall for me to jump through.” Deep in our DNA at ORU, we believe that our students must find their path and develop the sensitivity needed to hear God’s voice. We want our students to be so confident that they have heard God’s voice that, like Roberts said, they will “jump toward the wall believing that God will make a hole in it.”

Live with Generous Expectation

The final aspect of Roberts’ DNA that is seen in ORU is that of generosity. This principle is exemplified in his concept of Seed Faith.²⁰ The concept of Seed Faith was birthed out of an experience early in his ministry when he was trying to raise money for a new parsonage in Enid, Oklahoma. To excite the congregation, Roberts gave his entire week’s earnings into the offering without telling his wife, Evelyn. This act of faith was a huge sacrifice since they were living week to week, so much so that he did not know how he was going to feed his family that week. Nevertheless, about four in the morning a farmer knocked on his door and gave him a bag of money. The farmer explained that he could not sleep, so he went out and dug up the “seed money” he had stored away for the spring planting. When Roberts counted it, it was seven times more than his entire week’s earnings, which he had given at church that night.²¹ This early experience developed in Roberts a principle that would mark his entire ministry: “If you will sow, you will reap.” Roberts leaned heavily on this principle from Luke’s gospel: “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38 NKJV). Alternatively, in the *Message Bible*, the verse reads, “Give

away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity.”

While his concept of Seed Faith was applied to more than just finances, he keenly recognized that God's work required people to be generous. Oral Roberts once said to me that this principle was the thing that built everything: the ministry, the university, and the City of Faith. Roberts taught people that you can never out give God by giving generously. He preached that the more you sow, the more God brings your way. And if he can get it through you, he can bring it to you. Roberts truly believed that God will bless you if you are generous.

Conclusion

A half century ago, Oral Roberts dreamed a big dream to build a university. He accomplished that dream by hearing God's voice and obeying him no matter what. Today, ORU still embodies that vision. It is my desire that ORU continue as a vehicle in God's hands to spread the DNA of this university around the world so that in the days to come people will say, “That's a university that thinks big. They believe God is a good God. They believe all healing comes from God. They believe that the Holy Spirit is the foundation for all of life. They believe you need to hear God's voice, and when you hear him obey without compromise. And they believe that when you live generously and when you open your hands, God will open his hands.” Yes, we can learn a lot from the history of our DNA!



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Notes

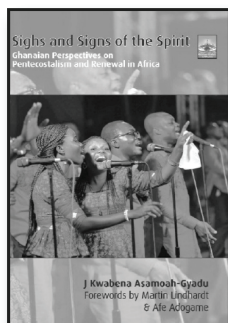
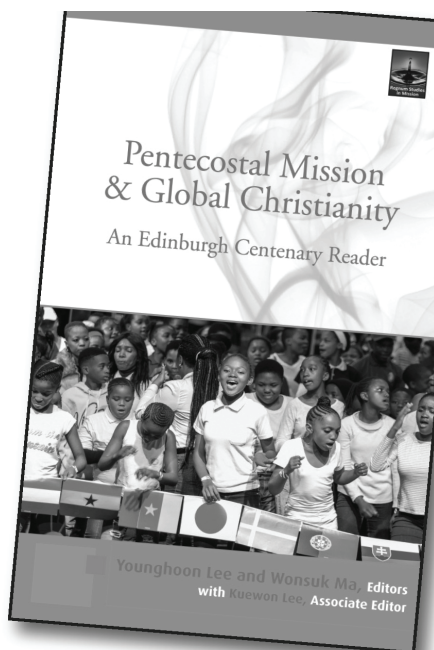
- 1 This study is an adaptation of a sermon originally delivered in chapel at Oral Roberts University on January 24, 2018, to mark Oral Roberts' 100th birthday. Minor editorial revisions to the original text were made for written publication.
- 2 Oral Roberts, *Expect a Miracle: My Life and Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 32.
- 3 David Edwin Harrell, *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), vii.
- 4 Neil Eskelin, *The New ORU: Empowered for the 21st Century* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts University, 2018), 126–59.
- 5 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 73.
- 6 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 33–34.
- 7 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 67–68.
- 8 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 76.
- 9 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 177–79.
- 10 Vinson Synan, “Oral Roberts: Son of Pentecostalism, Father of the Charismatic Movement,” *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 2:1–2 (2017), 18–19.
- 11 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 464–68.
- 12 Oral Roberts, *The Ultimate Voice: God's Still Small Voice, the Clearest and Loudest Voice You'll Ever Hear* (Tulsa, OK: Pengold Garrett & Assoc., 2008), 136.
- 13 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 210.
- 14 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 218–20.
- 15 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 177–78.
- 16 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 210.
- 17 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 165.
- 18 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 166.
- 19 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 166.
- 20 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 460–63.
- 21 Oral Roberts, *Seed-Faith 2000* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts, 1999), 13–17.

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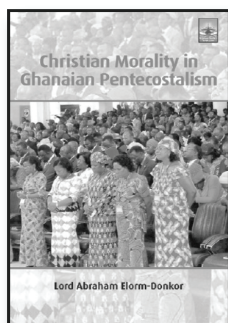
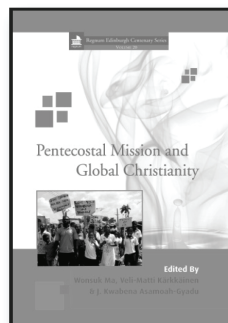
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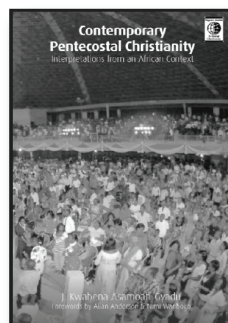
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PENTECOSTAL ROOTS OF ORAL ROBERTS' HEALING MINISTRY

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Key Words: *healing, Pentecostal Holiness Church, Oral Roberts*

Abstract

This article delves into the development of the healing doctrine of the Pentecostal Holiness Church in which Oral Roberts was born, raised, and ordained to the ministry. Attention is given to the roots of healing teachings from both Europe and America, which were adopted by the Pentecostal movement. The main part of the paper describes the doctrinal statements on healing in the founding documents of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the widespread acceptance of the Alexander Dowie position on refusing the use of doctors and medicine, the division over the use of remedies that produced the Congregational Holiness Church, and the later changes that emphasized the value of both prayer and medicine in the 1940s. This became the basic healing theology of Oral Roberts' ministry.

Introduction

It could truly be said that Oral Roberts was a son of the Pentecostal movement and a father of the Charismatic Movement. Born in 1918 and raised in the home of Ellis and Claudius Roberts, Pentecostal Holiness ministers, Roberts' formation was in classical Pentecostalism.

The only exception was the seven years after he joined the Methodist Church in Stratford, Oklahoma, and a few months as a teenager when he also joined the Atoka, Oklahoma, Methodist Church, along with the entire basketball team. After almost dying from tuberculosis, he was healed in 1935 and returned to the Pentecostal Holiness Church where he flourished as an evangelist and pastor until 1947. In that year he began his healing ministry under huge tents that made him a national figure. By 1954, he went on television and became a household name as millions watched his dynamic sermons and his healing lines. His national television ministry planted the seeds of the Charismatic Movement that broke out in all the mainline churches after 1960.¹

Perhaps the pivotal event in his entire life was when Roberts was healed of severe tuberculosis in 1935. The first sign of his illness was when he fell on the floor playing basketball in Atoka, Oklahoma, hemorrhaging blood. He was taken from there to his home in Stratford, Oklahoma, where he lay bedridden, coughing up blood and wasting away for 163 days. During these days he was finally converted due to the passionate prayers of his father and mother. Before this, despite the prayers of his father, Oral had left home and lived a dissolute life in high school before falling ill. All of this changed when Elmer Roberts, Oral's older brother, took him to a tent meeting in nearby Ada, Oklahoma, where a Church of God of Prophecy evangelist, George W. Moncey, was holding a healing crusade. For the first time, Oral saw a healing line where Moncey's hands were laid on over 200 persons. After the prayer line ended, Moncey came to where Oral was sitting and said the unforgettable words: "O Lord heal this boy" . . . and then he said, "You foul tormenting disease, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, come out of this boy. Loose him and let him go free."²

Immediately Oral said, "I felt the power of the Lord. It was like your hand striking me, like electricity going through me. It went into my lungs, went into my tongue, and all at once I could breathe. I could breathe all the way down. Before that when I tried to breathe all the way down I would hemorrhage."³

This was the great turning point in Oral Roberts' life that would soon lead him into the Pentecostal Holiness ministry as pastor and

evangelist and later into a worldwide healing ministry that would change the face of Christianity in the twentieth century.

Red-Letter Days

It was a red-letter day for the city of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and in the life of Oral Roberts when the dedication of the gleaming new Oral Roberts University took place on April 2, 1967. Over 18,000 friends came to hear Billy Graham dedicate the university while Roberts' bishop from the Pentecostal Holiness Church, Joseph A. Synan, read the Scriptures. The presence of these two men on the platform spoke volumes about Roberts' recent rise from the Pentecostal subculture in Oklahoma to become a world renowned religious leader with millions of followers. After being lionized at Billy Graham's Berlin Congress for evangelists in 1966, Roberts invited the famous Graham to dedicate his university.⁴

Another red-letter day occurred on November 1, 1981, when Roberts dedicated his City of Faith hospital before a crowd of 13,000 followers who gathered in the nearby Mabee Center due to torrential rains outside. Instead of Billy Graham, Roberts' charismatic friends filled the platform, including such luminaries as Demos Shakarian, Pat Robertson, and Oklahoma Governor George Nigh, who assisted in the dedication. Also on the platform was the Methodist educator, Jimmy Buskirk, whom Oral Roberts tapped to head the new ORU School of Theology after joining the Methodist Church in 1968.⁵

These two events highlighted the two major periods in Oral Roberts' life: his ministry as a Pentecostal Holiness evangelist and pastor, and his life as a Methodist leader in the burgeoning Charismatic Movement. Indeed, after becoming a well-known healing evangelist, Roberts claimed that his ministry began in 1947 when he held his first healing crusade in his hometown of Enid, Oklahoma. But as a matter of fact, Roberts' ministry began on the very night he was healed of tuberculosis in 1935. After the healing prayer by George Moncey, Roberts sprang to his feet, ran across the platform and exclaimed "I'm healed! I'm healed!" and preached his first sermon. He later said that the Lord spoke to him that very night saying, "Son, I am going to heal you and you are going to take my healing power to your generation. You

must build me a university and build it on my authority and the Holy Spirit.”⁶

Oral Roberts and the Pentecostal Holiness Church

After he regained his strength, Roberts joined his father in preaching local revivals where his audiences were amazed at his eloquence although he had stuttered badly since childhood. After this, Oral went on to be licensed to preach in 1936 and ordained to the Pentecostal Holiness ministry in 1937.⁷ In a few short years, Roberts gained attention as an effective evangelist preaching all over the nation and in faraway Canada. His meetings attracted overflow crowds with many hundreds converted.

He also published two books that helped to put him on the denominational map. They were *Salvation by the Blood* in 1938, and the *Drama of the End-Times* in 1941, both published by the Pentecostal Holiness Church. In addition to this, he was elected to represent his East Oklahoma Conference in the denomination’s General Conferences in Franklin Springs, Georgia, in 1941, and in Oklahoma City in 1945. All this marked young Roberts as a young rising star in the Pentecostal Holiness Church.⁸

During these years, although Roberts regularly testified to his healing experience in 1935, he seemed to be more interested in evangelism and prophecy than in divine healing. His sermons bristled with expositions and defenses of the five “cardinal doctrines” taught by the Pentecostal Holiness Church: salvation, sanctification, baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues, divine healing as in the atonement, and the imminent second coming of Christ. He also became a master of the dynamic Pentecostal style of preaching. Two of his models were Joseph Synan, his bishop, and G. H. Montgomery, editor of the *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, both of whom honed their skills in camp meetings and revivals in local churches. At this point Roberts was clearly a creature of his denomination.

For six years, from 1941 to 1947, Roberts pastored Pentecostal Holiness congregations in Shawnee and Enid in Oklahoma as well as in Toccoa, Georgia, and Fuqua Springs-Varina, North Carolina.

He was successful and dissatisfied at the same time as a local pastor. All the churches grew under his leadership and his pay rose to one of the highest levels in the church. It was in the parsonage of the Enid Pentecostal Holiness Church that Roberts received his definite call to the healing ministry in 1947. He said that he heard the Lord say, “Son, don’t be like other men, don’t be like any other denomination. Be like Jesus, and heal the people as he did.” It was also in Enid that he held his first healing service, which eventually launched him into becoming one of the most popular evangelists in the history of the United States.⁹

In 1947 Oral Roberts published his third book, *If You Need Healing—Do These Things*, and the next year began publication of his monthly magazine *Healing Waters*. At the same time he purchased his first “Tent Cathedral,” which seated some 3,000 persons. He later bought a much larger tent that seated 12,500. In May 1951, Roberts was featured along with Billy Graham in *Life* magazine as “the loudest and splashiest revivalist to appear since Billy Graham.”¹⁰ Roberts’ attractions were not only his spellbinding sermons, but his “healing line” where hundreds of people came each night to feel the healing touch of Oral Roberts’ hand. He now was the most noted healing evangelist since the death of Aimee Semple McPherson in 1943. All of this success came while Roberts was an ordained minister in the Pentecostal Holiness Church.

Roots of the Healing Movement

As a son of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, Oral Roberts received his understanding of divine healing from his parents and his church. Long before the birth of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the doctrine of divine healing had been developed by leaders of the American Holiness movement who were influenced by such European healing teachers as Presbyterian Edward Irving in London (1830), Lutheran Johann Christoph Blumhardt in Germany (1843), Dorothea Trudel in Switzerland (1851), and Otto Stockmayer in Switzerland (1867). The most influential book coming out of Europe in this period was Stockmayer’s *Sickness and the Gospel*, which pioneered the idea that physical healing for the body was included in the overall atonement.¹²

American Holiness writers were not far behind in producing a flood of books on healing. These included: William Boardman's 1881 book *The Lord that Healeth Thee*; Kelso Carter's 1884 book titled *The Atonement for Sin and Sickness; Or a Full Salvation for Soul and Body*; and Adoniram J. Gordon's *The Ministry of Healing*. Added to these writers were such healing practitioners as Dr. Charles Cullis of Boston, Massachusetts, and Alexander Dowie of Chicago, Illinois.

By saying that healing for the body was in the atonement, these writers were elevating divine healing into the center of the gospel mystery. In a way they were placing healing on the same level as salvation for the soul.

Dowie went much further than the others by teaching that true believers should not only pray for healing, but that they should not take any medicines or see any doctors, but "trust God for their bodies." To Dowie, doctors were "poisoners general and surgical butchers" and "Doctors, Drugs, and Devils" are "the Foes of Christ the Healer."¹³

When the Pentecostal Movement began after 1901, a large proportion of Pentecostals agreed with Dowie and promised God that they would never resort to doctors or medicines, but rely only on prayer for healing. The Dowie position was later immortalized in the Black Pentecostal spiritual "Come on in the Room":

Come on in the room,
Come on in the room;
Jesus is my doctor
and He writes out all of my prescriptions,
He gives me all of my medicine in the room.¹⁴

Healing Doctrine in the Pentecostal Holiness Church

The Pentecostal Holiness Church in which Oral Roberts was born and raised was a merger of two holiness churches with roots in the nineteenth-century Holiness movement. The first was the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church founded by former Primitive Baptist preacher Benjamin Hardin Irwin in 1898 in Anderson, South Carolina. It was an interracial church that offered ordination for women equal to that of men. Irwin became known as a healing evangelist who drew large

crowds to his meetings in America and Canada. All the Pentecostal Holiness Churches in Oklahoma began as part of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church.¹⁵

The other church was the Pentecostal Holiness Church founded in 1900 in Fayetteville, North Carolina, by Abner B. Crumpler, a Methodist evangelist. Both churches became Pentecostal in 1907–08 from direct contacts with Azusa Street and accepted tongues as the “initial evidence” of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Both churches also were strong advocates of divine healing “as in the atonement.” In 1911, the two churches merged and took the name of the smaller group—The Pentecostal Holiness Church.¹⁶

Both churches included strong doctrinal statements on divine healing in their founding documents. The Constitution of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, first adopted in 1898, contained the following short statement on divine healing: “We believe also in divine healing as in the atonement. (Isa. 53:3–5; Matt. 8:16, 17; Mark 16:14–18; James 5:14–16; Ex. 15:26).”¹⁷

The Pentecostal Holiness statement was one of the most liberal ones for the times. Although it accepted divine healing as in the atonement, it also allowed its members to use doctors and medicines in addition to prayer. In Section I of the Articles of Faith, it read:

The healing of the body of its sickness is a blessed provision of the atonement which is to be appropriated according to James 5:14–15, and other Scriptures. We do not consider it an evidence of sin or a mark or divine displeasure because a person is sick or employs a medical aid. Neither do we believe that it is an evidence in itself that a person is of God because he is healed in answer to prayer.¹⁸

When the two churches merged in 1911, the language of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church was adopted, indicating that the newly-merged church rejected the more liberal view on healing and opened the door for its members to adopt the Dowie view of no doctors or medicines.

The 1921 “Remedy” Controversy

As time went on, the Dowie position became the accepted view of the church leadership, as well as a probable majority of church members. Many took vows of never taking medicines or seeing doctors for themselves or for their families. They would “trust God for their bodies” for life. The popular testimonies of the time were: “Praise God, I am saved, sanctified, filled with the Holy Ghost, and have trusted God for my body for 20 years,” the last claim referring to how long they had refused to see doctors or take medicines. One leader, Samuel D. Page, reported that he had been “saved and healed” for twenty-seven years.¹⁹

Inevitably, some passionate believers ran afoul of the law for refusing medical treatment for dying spouses or children. One leader, F. M. Britton, was threatened with arrest in South Carolina for allowing his wife and a son to die in agony after Britton “refused medicine” for them.²⁰ Some top leaders in the church, such as Joseph H. King and George F. Taylor, made similar vows and refused to see doctors or take medicines. But there were others who disagreed with the majority view, including Hugh Bowling, Superintendent of the Georgia Conference, and his friend Watson Sorrow, a leading evangelist. In 1919 Bowling published an article in the church paper, *The Advocate*, stating that “it was no sin at all to take ‘remedies’ and that going to a doctor implied no lack of faith in the patient.”²¹

This led to a firestorm on the pages of *The Advocate* with hot letters and articles following pro and con on the issue. In defending his position, Bowling wrote in April 1920,

I do not believe those who get sick and use no remedies and drag around for weeks and after so long a time get well are divinely healed, but that nature alone restored them . . . I do not believe in lying about divine healing. I do not believe that sickness is an evidence of unbelief. I do not believe that healing is paralleled in the atonement.²²

This was the last straw for Taylor and King. In short order, Bowling and Sorrow were summoned to Franklin Springs to stand trial for

their views on divine healing. When they failed to appear for the trial, the two men were expelled from the church, not for preaching false doctrine, but for failure to appear for the trial. But they did not go alone. On January 21, 1921, Bowling and Sorrow took fourteen churches out of the denomination and organized the Congregational Holiness Church in the town of High Shoals, Georgia.²³

As a matter of interest, both King and Taylor changed their minds and at the end of their lives made use of doctors and medicines. In fact, the *Pentecostal Holiness Church Manual* added a “Doctrinal Emphasis” written by Bishop King in 1945, which, after reaffirming that divine healing was “wrought solely by the application of the atonement to the body,” added the following statement:

Natural means viewed as a product of the law of recovery are not to be despised. Neither are we to look upon their use as sinful on the part of believers in Christ. The healing of Calvary’s stream is the “better way,” and the way to secure complete and permanent healing of all sickness and disease.²⁴

Added to this was the doctrinal “Amplification” written by Bishop J. A. Synan in 1961, which presented the same view as King. He stated:

And while we do not condemn the use of medical means in the treatment of physical disease, we do believe in, practice, and commend to our people the laying on of hands by the elders or leaders of the church, the anointing with oil in the name of the Lord, and the offering of prayers for the healing of the sick.²⁵

As a postscript to the “remedies controversy” that divided the church in 1921, the original cause of the division was eventually resolved and the Pentecostal Holiness Church admitted that they were on the wrong side of the question. But all attempts to heal the division that produced the Congregational Holiness Church, including apologies, failed to heal the breach between the two denominations that have since gone their separate ways.

Oral Roberts was born in 1918 so the division in his church took place when he was three years old. By the time of his healing in 1935, he felt that the teaching on divine healing had waned somewhat among Pentecostals in the parts of Oklahoma where he lived. So when he began his healing ministry in 1947, Roberts had formed his healing theology from his roots in the Pentecostal Holiness Church. In short, by that time the church still believed that divine healing was provided for in the atonement and that sick persons should first ask for healing prayer with the laying on of hands, but that medicine and doctors could also be used to hasten the healing process. Therefore, healing prayer and medical means were both acceptable to members of the church.

Oral Roberts' Innovations

Adding to the teachings of his church, Roberts began to read widely and expanded his theological and pastoral horizons. Two secular books that deeply affected his future outlook were Dale Carnegie's famous book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which was recommended by his rich and successful friend Lee Braxton. Another influential and controversial book that influenced Roberts was Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*, a secular handbook on how to envision your way to wealth.²⁶

Roberts also was influenced by some of the healing evangelists of the middle 1940s. These included Thomas Wyatt from Portland, Oregon, and William Branham from Jeffersonville, Indiana. There is a famous photo of Oral Roberts standing with Branham and Gordon Lindsay in Kansas City in 1948 at the outset of Roberts' healing ministry. These evangelists challenged Roberts to launch out as a major healing evangelist.²⁷

Roberts soon developed some new approaches to his healing ministry. He continued the laying on of hands as he had been taught, and indeed laid hands on more than one million persons in his healing lines. He also added that he had special healing power in his right hand and that this "point of contact" brought special healing power to the sick persons to whom he ministered. He also erected special prayer tents near the main tent where he could go and pray for people in wheel

chairs who could not make it to the healing lines.²⁸

Perhaps his most important innovation was bringing his healing services to television audiences in 1954. Now millions of people who might never enter his tent could hear his sermons and witness his healing prayers in their own living rooms. The results were electric. Multiplied millions of Roman Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and others could witness dynamic Pentecostal religion in their own homes. In time, Roberts' television programs made him the most popular television evangelist of his time.²⁹

Another major innovation was the founding of Oral Roberts University (ORU) in 1965. Roberts had been interested in higher education before the beginning of his healing ministry. In 1946 he had helped his friend R. O. Corvin to found the Southwestern Pentecostal Holiness College in Oklahoma City and briefly served on the faculty. He also raised money for Emmanuel College in Georgia in the late 1940s. The founding mission for Oral Roberts University was summarized in Roberts' visionary statement that was written on a napkin while dining with Pat Robertson in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1960:

Raise up your students to hear my voice, to go where the light is dim, where my voice is heard small and my healing power is not known, even to the uttermost bounds of the earth. Their work will exceed yours and in this I am well pleased.³⁰

After the dedication of ORU in 1967 with Billy Graham as the main speaker, ORU grew to some 5,000 students at its height in the 1970s.³¹

Perhaps Roberts' most original innovation was the building of the three-towered City of Faith hospital that was dedicated in 1981. Here he planned to "merge prayer and medicine" in a profound new way. This slogan was exactly the position of the Pentecostal Holiness Church on healing after the "remedies" controversy of the early 1920s. Although the City of Faith was a financial disaster resulting in the closing of the hospital in 1989, the university later converted the towers into office space and maintained the property as an endowment. It was later renamed CityPlex Towers.³²

What Roberts Retained from His Pentecostal Formation

When he joined the United Methodist Church in 1968, Roberts declared that he would still and always be a Pentecostal. To his new pastor, Finis Crutchfield, at the Boston Avenue United Methodist Church, and his new bishop, Angie Smith, Roberts said, “there will be no change in my standard of the Full Gospel message or of my life, my ministry, or of ORU.” He later elaborated, “I was a classical Pentecostal and charismatic before I joined the Methodist Church. I was the same during the nineteen years I was in the Methodist Church”³³

Becoming a Methodist was probably the most controversial action of his entire life, causing puzzlement in the press, among liberal Methodists, and among his friends in the Pentecostal Holiness Church. Indeed, his financial support dropped drastically at first as Pentecostals withdrew their support. But in time his new Methodist supporters more than made up the shortfall, especially after Roberts began his prime-time television shows in 1969.

All went well with the Roberts ministry for several years after he joined the Methodist Church, but underneath the surface opposition to Roberts being a Methodist minister began to grow among Methodist leaders who were embarrassed by Roberts’ controversial public image. In 1987, the *Tulsa World* stated that Roberts was “cast out of the Methodist Church by a special committee of leaders.” After this Roberts organized the International Charismatic Bible Ministries (ICBM) organization in 1986 where he could spend his time with his Pentecostal and Charismatic friends until his death in 2009 at 91 years of age.³⁴

In 1995 Roberts wrote positively about his upbringing and ministry for almost fifty years in the Pentecostal Holiness Church: “I had become a spoon-fed denominational preacher. I had accepted about 95 percent of everything the denomination taught and did without questioning why or studying the Word of God for myself to ‘see if these things were true.’ I had become an echo, not a ‘voice of one crying in the wilderness.’” He went on to describe what he received from the church on the matter of divine healing, which he felt was not being adequately emphasized at that time. He said, “Whether by divine

design or by my belonging to that denomination and submitting wholly to it, that calling of taking God's healing power to my generation became submerged." He added:

That denomination had a little book called *The Discipline*, and in it were printed the fundamental doctrines and practices of that church. It included a strong section on the healing of the sick being in the atonement of Christ on the cross. That was a powerful doctrine and statement of purpose. There was, however, no major emphasis on healing as being a practice of the church that I could observe, other than a belief that if you got sick, you were to have faith, and if you could hold out, you were not to go to a doctor . . . I do know one thing: I became intensely loyal to believing in the exclusivity of that denomination, although I differed with it on medical science as a viable part of what God has placed on earth for our better health, and the smallness of its vision.³⁵

He further went on to say:

I cannot blame the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the denomination I belonged to for the first years of my ministry. The people of that denomination were there long before I was converted and healed and given the call of the healing ministry. They had paid the price to form their own beliefs and denomination and had worked hard for it. In many ways they were a blessing to me. They helped form the patterns of my life in learning the value of being baptized in the Holy Spirit, of living a holy life, of learning loyalty and developing integrity. I made lasting friendships among the people.³⁶

Conclusion

Looking back over his life, one can see an amazing simplicity and consistency in Roberts' life and ministry. Despite his worldwide acclaim, his amazing accomplishments, and his persuasive influence on American religious life, one must agree with his biographer David

Edwin Harrell who said in his *Oral Roberts: An American Life*:

Oral had not changed. He still believed what Ellis and Claudia had taught him in the little [Pentecostal Holiness] churches of Southeast Oklahoma. He believed in miracles, in visions and anointed prayer cloths. He was still that marveling, faith filled little Oklahoma boy who had clamped his hand on thousands of heads.³⁷



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Notes

1 See Vinson Synan, "Oral Roberts: Son of Pentecostalism, Father of the Charismatic Movement," *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 2:1–2 (2017), 5–21. The major sources for Oral Roberts' life are his two autobiographies, *The Call: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972) and *Expect a Miracle: My Life and Ministry, an Autobiography* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995); and David Edwin Harrell, *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Bloomington, IN., Indiana University Press, 1985). A short biography by Paul Chappell appeared in "Granville Oral Roberts," in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stan Burgess and Eduard Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 1024–25. Roberts' career in the Pentecostal Holiness Church can be found in Vinson Synan, *Old-Time Power: A History of the Pentecostal Holiness Church* (Franklin Springs, GA: Advocate Press, 1973, 1998). For the dedication service see Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 228–30.

2 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 30–34. A striking description of this event can be found in Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 3–7.

3 Roberts, *The Call*, 27–35.

4 For the dedication see Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 228–30.

5 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 295, 390–91; and Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 271–88. A long account of his joining the Methodist Church can be found in Roberts, *The Call*, 125–46.

6 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 5–7; Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 30–33.

- 7 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 37. Also see *Minutes of the East Oklahoma Conference*, 1937, 10.
- 8 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 35–54.
- 9 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 75–82; Roberts, *The Call*, 37–44; Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 55–69.
- 10 See “A New Revivalist,” *Life*, 30 May 1951, 73–78.
- 11 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 80–170.
- 12 See Stanley Burgess and Paul Lewis, *A Light to the Nations* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2017), 286–300.
- 13 Alexander Dowie, “Doctors, Drugs and Devils, Or, the Foes of Christ the Healer,” *Physical Culture*, April 1895, 81–86.
- 14 Lyrics from <https://www.elyrics.net>.
- 15 For the story of Benjamin Hardin and the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, see Vinson Synan and Dan Woods, *The Many Lives of B. H. Irwin* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2017). All the Pentecostal Holiness churches in Oklahoma were organized out of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church in Oklahoma City, which met in the Blue Front Saloon. After the 1911 merger they took the name Pentecostal Holiness.
- 16 For the founding of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, see Synan, *Old Time Power*, 68–92.
- 17 *Constitution of the Fire Baptized Holiness Church*, 1905, 3.
- 18 *The Discipline of the Pentecostal Holiness Church* (n.p., n.d). [Hand-written notes on the cover say “Possibly 1909”] (A. H. Butler), “Before 1911” (W. E. Morris), 12.
- 19 Synan, *Old Time Power*, 162.
- 20 F. M. Britton, *Pentecostal Truth* (Royston, GA: Publishing House of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, 1919), 244–46.
- 21 Synan, *Old Time Power*, 163.
- 22 Hugh Bowling, *The Advocate*, April 1920, 3–5.
- 23 Synan, *Old Time Power*, 165–66. Also see B. L. Cox, *History and Doctrine of the Congregational Holiness Church* (Greenwood, SC: n.p., 1958), 7–9.
- 24 *The Pentecostal Holiness Church Manual*, 1989, 35–36.
- 25 *The Pentecostal Holiness Church Manual*, 1989, 47.
- 26 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 123. Also see Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 115.
- 27 For the photo see Paul Chappell, “Healing Movements,” in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley Burgess and Gary McGee (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 353–74.
- 28 Eventually Roberts issued prayer cards that admitted people to the prayer lines. All others were sent to the prayer tent. See Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 96–97.
- 29 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 171–72. Also see Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 142–59. Roberts

was encouraged to go into television by his friend, Rex Humbard, who had pioneered television ministry since 1952 from his church in Akron, Ohio.

30 See Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 161–62. There are two versions of where the dinner took place. Harrell says it was in Richmond, Virginia, while Oral Roberts says it was in Norfolk, Virginia. See Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 207; Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 161.

31 For the ORU story see Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 199–252.

32 For the City of Faith Story see Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 381–96; Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 251–70.

33 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 294; Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 322.

34 See Vinson Synan, “Oral Roberts: Son of Pentecostalism, Father of the Charismatic Movement,” 5–21. For ICBM see Paul Chappell, “Granville Oral Roberts,” 1024–25.

35 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 376.

36 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 375.

37 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 436.

ORAL ROBERTS' THEOLOGY OF HEALING

A JOURNEY FROM PENTECOSTAL “DIVINE HEALING”
TO CHARISMATIC “SIGNS AND WONDERS” TO
SPIRIT-EMPOWERED “WHOLE PERSON HEALING”

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Abstract

This paper traces the development and articulation of Oral Roberts' theology of healing through three discernible stages. From the perspective of a participant observer during the final stage of Roberts' healing ministry, the author examines Roberts' writings to show that his healing theology moved from a classical Pentecostal theology of divine healing of his roots to a theology of “Holy Spirit in the Now” that emphasized signs and wonders befitting the Charismatic Movement he led, to a final stage that might be characterized as a Spirit-empowered theology of whole person health. Attention has been given to Roberts' conceptual and linguistic contributions of point of contact, seed-faith, and prayer language, as well as the rise and fall and impact of the City of Faith Medical and Research Center as a laboratory for whole person health care.

Introduction

According to Vinson Synan, eyewitness historian of the modern Spirit-empowered movement, Oral Roberts was a son of Pentecostalism and father of the Charismatic Movement.¹ Roberts was born in a Pentecostal Holiness pastor's home in Oklahoma where he grew up to become a young preacher with the testimony of a dramatic healing from tuberculosis. He was ordained in 1936 and pastored four churches between 1941 and 1947, but was not satisfied with the local pastorates and the state of his denomination at that point. Although he had the promise of a bright future within his denomination, multiple ministerial experiences and a sense of calling led him to launch a healing ministry in 1947 with a crusade in Enid, Oklahoma. Held in the civic auditorium, this meeting was attended by 1,200 persons. Roberts was willing to let go of the local pastorate permanently and continue the crusade model of evangelistic healing ministry if the first crusade drew 1,000 people, the expenses of the meeting were fully met, and at least one healing took place.² The crusade in Enid fulfilled all three "fleeces" to his satisfaction and he was ready to proceed. A failed attempt later by a strange man to kill him at a crusade in Tulsa, where a bullet missed his head by just eighteen inches, unexpectedly gave Roberts and his ministry significant national recognition.

Roberts began to hold healing campaigns across America in large portable tents. The first tent seated 3,000 people and as the crowd grew, the largest one, which he called his "traveling cathedral," seated more than 12,500 people!³ Several crusades were held outside the United States. Through his monthly magazine *Healing Waters*, which later was named *Abundant Life*, nationally-heard radio programs, and widely-read syndicated newspaper columns, Roberts' ministry and message spread across the country and around the world. His first book on healing, *If You Need Healing Do These Things*, was also published in 1947, which unfolded the initial rubrics of his theology of healing.

Oral Roberts conducted over three hundred healing crusades and personally prayed for multitudes of people. His Sunday morning television program was the number one syndicated religious program in America for almost three decades. Since the publication of his first

book, he has written extensively about healing, the Holy Spirit, and the principles of seed-faith, which helps one to notice the development and articulation of a comprehensive theology that undergirded his healing praxis. The thesis of this paper is that in reviewing his work, one can see the integration of a theology of divine healing based on the atonement from his Pentecostal roots with a theology that emphasized the charismata and “signs and wonders” from the Charismatic Movement he led, forming a comprehensive theology of Spirit-empowered whole person healing.

Pentecostal Divine Healing Roots

The modern Pentecostal movement embraced the doctrine of divine healing from its very beginning in the early twentieth century. Adherents accepted this position as their legacy from pre-Pentecostal holiness and healing movements and the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. They believed that God had given a remedy for all the effects of sin in the atonement and this included healing of both physical and spiritual issues. The conviction that “healing is provided in the atonement” produced several healing ministry practices in the nineteenth century, which included holding prayer meetings, conducting healing conferences, and developing care facilities called faith homes. These homes provided the sick residents compassionate care, prayer, and instruction on restoring and maintaining health. In some circles, the commitment to divine healing required the denial of any medical treatment for the patient. There were some segments, on the other hand, that advocated integrating prayer with medical practice.

Pentecostals were committed to the “full gospel,” which required them to proclaim the name of Jesus as savior, healer, Spirit-baptizer, and soon-coming king. Some were also committed to preaching Jesus as sanctifier, but all of them believed that healing was one of the things that “follow them that believe” (Mark 16:16). This theological commitment to divine healing has remained a major theme in classical Pentecostalism and it is credited for its unmatched growth.⁴

Born and raised in abject poverty as a person of Native American heritage in a small town in Oklahoma, Oral Roberts was familiar with

scarcity and sickness. His own healing from tuberculosis as a teenager had a great impact on his outlook on sickness and health. As a Pentecostal preacher's kid and young minister, he believed in divine healing and felt a calling to offer it to hurting people everywhere. His vision of healing and health was not limited to the members of his congregation or denomination alone, but extended far beyond the walls of the church. The year 1947, which produced his first crusade and the first book on healing, was a crucial year in this journey of faith.

The foundation of Oral Roberts' healing theology is a simple biblical concept: God is a good God (Ps 107:1) and he wants to heal the sick.⁵ (Roberts called the devil a bad devil.) The nation seemed to be unprepared for such an unconditional declaration about God, but Roberts believed it and proclaimed it across the world. His straightforward and simple statements were frustrating to people who looked for theological nuances, which resulted in misunderstanding, persecution, and rejection, even from his own denomination. But Roberts found an audience elsewhere that was responding very positively to his message.

Roberts added other planks to his foundational theological platform. In *Better Health and Miracle Living* he presented six steps of healing:

- 1) Know that it is God's will to heal you and make you a whole person;
- 2) Remember that healing begins in the inner man;
- 3) Use a point of contact for the release of your faith;
- 4) Release your faith;
- 5) Close the case for victory;
- 6) Join yourself to companions of faith.

He taught,

- 1) You will be in a great position to have health and success if your relationship with God your source is right;
- 2) Your life will be completely different if you learn to plant good seeds with God and with people you like or dislike;
- 3) You can expect many miracles for yourself if you have a right relationship with yourself and with God.

Roberts considered healing a believer's "covenant right." He stated that from the front of the cross we see forgiveness and from the backside we see "the full measure of God's desire to heal us." At the cross, Jesus received upon himself our sins and with them all our diseases by absorbing them to himself. His commentary on the Bible says, "Our sins HAVE BEEN forgiven. Our diseases WERE HEALED. The victory has been won by Jesus and by our FAITH we can receive of God's redemption, the full measure of our deliverance."⁸

Roberts saw all sicknesses in the context of a great battle between Satan's destructive forces and God's power that is ready to heal, especially for those who claim their covenant right of healing. Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but God's will is our restoration and healing. Roberts connects the spiritual battle to the idea of a "point of contact," a concept he introduced to Pentecostal healing ministry and vocabulary. He illustrates point of contact in his commentary on the healing of Jairus' daughter: "You are in between. Jairus held onto his point of contact, and it worked to keep his faith operating. When you ask God to heal you, if you are serious, there will be a tremendous conflict. But if you continue to look to God, your source of healing, He will give you the courage you need . . . He had SAID, 'Lay your hands on her and she will be healed.' SAYING it started his point of contact."⁹ The healing process involves believing, fighting one's fears, not doubting, and saying words of faith as a point of contact.

"Point of contact" is a major component of Roberts' theology of healing. A point of contact makes faith "a definite act of believing." This act of believing can be seen in the actions of the woman with the issue of blood who touched Christ's garment. She was not simply "finger touching," he said, "instead she was touching Him with her FAITH."¹⁰ "Faith for healing is a definite transaction. It springs loose what God has already made available for you and me in the covenant. HE HAS ALREADY DONE IT."¹¹ A point of contact sets the time for one's faith to be released. "There is a definite time when you put your faith into action."¹² "A point of contact is something you do . . . and when you do it you cause your faith to go up out of your heart TO God. It's not enough to have faith. Your faith is in you to be turned loose—to be sent to God, your Savior and Source."¹³

Releasing one's faith is the central issue in healing, and the key to opening up this process is the point of contact. It appears that a point of contact is a concrete action, but it has both tangible and intangible dimensions. Consider Roberts' explanation:

Your point of contact can be one of several things. Mine is my right hand. Though there is no healing virtue in my right hand, God spoke to me and told me that I would feel His power through my right hand. It is a sensation of God's presence. When I lay my hand on the head of the person seeking God's healing and begin to pray, I often feel this power going through my right hand. The moment I feel it, my faith is very strong. This point of contact helps me to release my faith to God. Also, it helps the person seeking healing. When my faith and his faith contact with God, the healing begins. This is the point of contact we have used in our crusades, either through my hands or those of our team members. However, there are many other ways—such as the anointing oil of James 5:14, 15, the laying on of hands in Mark 16:17, 18 and the blessed cloths of Acts 19:11, 12. What does it matter what the point of contact is if it helps you release your faith?¹⁴

Later on, he connected point of contact with the idea of seed-faith, another conceptual and vocabulary contribution he made. There are three steps involved in seed-faith:

- 1) Make God your source (Phil. 4:19);
- 2) Give ("plant a seed") and it shall be given to you (Luke 6:38);
- 3) Expect a Miracle (Mark 11:24).

Roberts' seven "rules of healing" provide practical steps for those seeking healing:

- 1) Recognize that sickness is the oppression of the devil and that God wants you to be well and happy;
- 2) Believe the message of deliverance, no matter who is God's messenger;
- 3) Go where the power of God is even though you may have to change your attitude and way of life;
- 4) Put your faith in God, not man. Remember, the man of God is the instrument. God is the Healer;
- 5) Accept God's correction, for He knows best;
- 6) Lose yourself, for then you can become a new person;
- 7) Use a point of contact and be healed, a whole person again.¹⁶

A nine-step prescription incorporates faith, seed-faith, and point of contact:

- 1) Get God into your life in a way He has never been there before;
- 2) Get your attitude in the direction of living instead of dying;
- 3) Put your attitude into action. DO SOMETHING. Make some decisions and get going;
- 4) Plant. Take your life—your money, your time, your love, your good attitude—and invest it in God's fertile soil;
- 5) Make your seed-planting a Point of Contact for each point of need in your life;
- 6) Grab hold of each burst of healing you receive;
- 7) Place the name of JESUS above the name of anything that causes you to have disease;
- 8) Run toward the goal of whole health that God has for you;
- 9) Decide today that you are going to carry out this prescription.¹⁷

Healing is related to faith and faith comes by hearing of the word of God. Therefore, preaching of the word is central to Roberts' teaching on healing. To him, healing faith is directly related to the hearing of the word of God. He was a very dynamic preacher. His faith-stirring sermons in the crusades prepared people for healing. "The Fourth Man" was one of the most preached sermons with great impact on the listeners in terms of increasing their faith. They lined up to be prayed for by Roberts by the hundreds as he prayed like a man whose very existence depended on the outcome of his prayers. He declared his own faith in God as he prayed for each person. Anyone seeing the old black and white tapes/videos of the crusades will witness a man of compassion who was moved by the ailments he encountered.

Roberts sought biblical insights regarding unanswered prayers. He tried to understand God's "no" in light of his love and goodness. He concluded that God's "no" is not necessarily no. It means he has a better way. God's refusal is subject to change when we conform to his will. He wants what is ultimately best for us. God had a better way for Paul. His thorn became an instrument to keep him humble and dependent on God. "When God says wait, it means that in a special way His will or purpose is involved When Jesus told Mary and Martha to wait, His will was to perform a greater miracle that so many more would believe on Him."¹⁸

A classical Pentecostal understanding of divine healing that was built on the atonement was central to Oral Roberts' theology of healing. It formed his theological foundation, but he added the new concepts of point of contact and seed-faith to enhance that theology to increase the faith of his listeners. This new version recognized the sovereignty of God, but left open the possibility and expectation for healing due to actionable faith called point of contact and seed-faith.

Charismatic "Signs and Wonders"

Television entered the American living room in the 1950s and rapidly began to change the national culture. While Pentecostals denounced the new invention as a tool of the devil, Oral Roberts saw the opportunity to bring his crusades to the living rooms of America through this new

medium. He pioneered televangelism and maintained a continuous ministry presence on television beginning in 1954.¹⁹ Millions of people belonging to multiple Christian traditions and many unchurched witnessed the miracles of healing taking place in his crusade tents on television. They sought his prayer and sent money to support his ministry. Oral Roberts became a household name and Oral Roberts Ministry became a formidable spiritual force in America. His growing ministry of healing evangelism embodied a particular theology, a theology rooted in Pentecostal healing theology supplemented by his own new theological constructs. This theology was enhanced by Oral Roberts' personal experiences and the dynamics of the expansion of Pentecostalism into the mainline denominations and the founding of and resources of organizations like the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship, and later Oral Roberts University (ORU). At the heart of this theology was Pentecostal divine healing, wrapped up in a pneumatology that Roberts taught as "Holy Spirit in the Now!"

Oral Roberts was instrumental in removing the stigma of Pentecostal "tongues" by introducing the new vocabulary of "prayer language," thereby facilitating the growth of Pentecostalism into the mainline church world. It is only reasonable to say that the Charismatic Movement came mainly out of the fires of Pentecostal healing evangelism led by Oral Roberts. This pentecostalization of mainline churches through the Charismatic Movement required theological adaptations. Divine healing was too Pentecostal to be charismatic! Manifestations of the charismata and signs and wonders, on the other hand, with no such Pentecostal baggage, became more palatable, especially when traditionally non-Pentecostal concepts of point of contact and seed-faith were added.

While the Pentecostals enjoyed the blessed assurance of "healing in the atonement," charismatics were growing by emphasizing the charismata and promoting healing as it relates to the gifts of the Spirit and as signs and wonders. Howard M. Ervin, in his panoramic view of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement, saw healing as a sign of the Kingdom of God confirming the preaching of the gospel and as a love gift of God to his beloved children.²⁰

As a charismatic healing evangelist, Roberts de-pentecostalized

speaking in tongues (now called prayer language) and divine healing (now emphasized in the charismata). While the Word of Faith movement was gaining strength within the Charismatic Movement, Roberts remained ecumenical in his approach to ministry and invited well-known healing ministers like Katharine Kuhlmann, Vineyard Fellowship founder John Wimber, and Catholic healing practitioner Father Francis MacNutt to minister on the campus of Oral Roberts University. Holy Spirit conferences were held on the ORU campus on a regular basis. Under the deanship of Larry Lea, a charismatic Baptist pastor from Texas who followed the founding dean Jimmy Buskirk, a Methodist, the School of Theology and Missions (former name) at ORU was promoted as a “signs and wonders” seminary. The Word of Faith preachers led by Kenneth Hagin, Sr., of Rhema Ministries in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, assigned great power to the spoken word of the believer in terms of receiving or thwarting healing. Roberts remained committed to a ministry of healing and miracles with signs and wonders and did not emphasize the teaching of Rhema regarding the power of verbal confession as a major theme of his theology of healing.

Unlike many in the Pentecostal movement, Roberts was not afraid to address the issue of unanswered prayer. He also addressed the issue of death and dying in the context of a healing ministry.

“It is appointed unto men once to die, after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9: 27). Death is a divine appointment. Death is classed as an enemy, our final enemy. But even in the process of dying I have seen miraculous things happen—release from pain, even the disappearance of the disease. You may ask, how then could the person die? Because there is a time to die, as well as a time to be born (Ecclesiastes 3: 2). Sick or well, you are going to die. Sickness unchecked can hasten it. However, when death’s time comes nothing will hold it back. We must be prepared to go at any moment (right in our heart with God and people).²¹

He called death an appointment and considered it the only card the devil has. Roberts’ theology of death was sober and biblically sound. He

was a realist and a healer at the same time. In *Better Health and Miracle Living* he recaptured a conversation he had with a physician regarding patients who die after prayer for healing is offered. He compared his healing work as an evangelist to that of a physician who tries hard to heal the patients, but is not successful always. He said,

. . . there have been times I have prayed for persons I felt would recover; some did and some did not. But I know that I am not God, only His instrument. My part is to pray, His is to make the final judgment. I pray for healing because I believe it is God's purpose to make people well. However, I don't always know when a person is going to die, or shall we say, is going to meet his divine appointment—so I pray with all the faith I have just as you, as a physician, use all your skill to make the person well.²³

Oral Roberts was not just a man of faith; he was also a man of hope. He expressed his theology of hope in his well-known slogans: “Expect a miracle” and “Something good is going to happen to you!” It is fair to say that his healing theology of “Holy Spirit in the Now” and signs and wonders was rooted in a Pentecostal theology of divine healing based on the atonement and a charismatic theology of hope. With the conceptual addition of point of contact and seed-faith, this theology went beyond possibility of healing to expectation of healing where the sick could participate in their own healing through the principles of seed-faith and point of contact. “You have to go after wholeness,” he said, “It doesn't just happen automatically.”²⁴

Spirit-Empowered Whole Person Healing

Oral Roberts was a healing evangelist, a man who believed in miracles and prayed for them earnestly. He had a well-defined faith-based healing theology that appeared to be simplistic on television. As a master communicator, Roberts did not believe that a half-hour TV program was the place to cover all the theological nuances. However, he did not hesitate to give the full version of his theology in his teachings

on the campus of Oral Roberts University and in some of his books. Many still do not know that Roberts was not a “traditional” Pentecostal faith healer who rejected medicine as a natural means of healing. He was open to both natural and supernatural ways of healing. In fact, Oral Roberts did not separate the natural from the supernatural. To him, he was dealing with a continuum, allowing easy movement from the natural to the supernatural and vice versa. “I never have, and don’t now, and never expect to make a major difference between supernatural and natural healing. Jesus told me that we can’t put even a piece of tissue paper between His natural and supernatural power.”²⁵ To Oral Roberts, all healing is divine. “Both natural and supernatural healing powers work together for the healing of people, thus demonstrating that ALL HEALING IS DIVINE So we have Jesus healing not only by faith but also by putting within that sphere of healing the physician, which means from our Lord’s standpoint, ALL HEALING IS DIVINE whether it’s medical or by prayer and faith.”²⁶ He advised his followers to value the instrument of healing but worship the Source—God.²⁷

Classical Pentecostals and some charismatics who initially revolted against Roberts’ position on medical treatment eventually found it generally acceptable. Many old-time Pentecostals experienced real relief from condemnation poured out on them by their faith communities for reaching out to the medical profession for help.

Oral Roberts University has its roots in healing evangelism. Founded in 1963, the university soon became a fully accredited institution built on a well-defined educational philosophy called Whole Person Education. ORU seeks students who are on a quest for wholeness. Education at ORU is seen as a journey toward wholeness. Unlike other higher education institutions, ORU is a unique place of learning and development in body, mind, and spirit, where students are required to develop intellectually, spiritually, and physically with intentionality and assessments. The ORU Catalog states, “Since the key distinctive of Oral Roberts University is healing . . . all of the university courses seek to educate students toward healing and restoration in every facet of society.” In the founder’s own words to the first class on September 7, 1965:

Wholeness is a way of life here. It's something you can get; it's something you can become. You can leave as the whole person God intended you to be . . . while we are innovators in educational techniques, we are definitely old-fashioned when it comes to Christian morals and character Along with your academic progress and your physical fitness, we expect you to be open to the creative activity of the Holy Spirit in your inner man, indeed in your whole person. The focus is to assist students to develop a Christian worldview³⁰

The university was not only replacing the earlier tent ministry; it was also reproducing healers with an expanded definition of healing. As the medical, dental, nursing, and law schools were added, statements like “lawyers are healers too” began to be heard on campus. The founding of the university gave Oral Roberts many opportunities to articulate his philosophy of whole person education and his understanding of healing as wholeness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

City of Faith³¹

Out of the necessity to have a place to train doctors and nurses and to return to the healing roots of his ministry, the City of Faith Medical and Research Center was opened in 1981. The founding of the ORU Medical School and later the City of Faith Medical and Research Center were bold initiatives built on the confidence Roberts had in what he had learned and practiced about healing. Healing teams of doctors, nurses, ministers, and others functioned with full institutional support in the sixty-story City of Faith complex on the ORU campus. The sixty-foot tall healing hands made of bronze (similar to praying hands, but not the same) established at the entrance of the towers (now moved to the entrance of the university) symbolized the merging of prayer and medicine, the natural and the supernatural. To Roberts, one of these hands represented the Apostle Paul's hand (minister) and the other Luke the physician's hand. In spite of local controversies related to Oklahoma politics and the sheer resistance against an evangelist being

involved in medical education, the initiative to “merge medicine and prayer” was watched by the whole nation and caught the attention of Christians everywhere. People were moved by the concept and with the sacrificial financial support of the Oral Roberts Ministry partners, the institution was built with user-friendly floor plans and the latest available technology. It opened on November 1, 1981.

Along with highly skilled medical professionals, the City of Faith had clinically trained professional chaplains who were called prayer partners. At one point, there were nearly fifty professional chaplains and counselors working in the clinics and the hospital. They were supported by hundreds of trained lay prayer partners from Tulsa area churches. Students from the ORU Seminary joined them to learn and to practice healing ministry in an institutional context. The City of Faith had an approved Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program led by the former president of the College of Chaplains (now Association of Professional Chaplains), Herbert Hillebrand. The entire Spiritual Care Division was led by a retired army chaplain, Col. Duie Jernigan, Ph.D. This writer joined the staff of the City of Faith two weeks before the hospital opened in 1981, and later became the leader of the Pastoral Care Department (chaplains) of the Spiritual Care Division, which included both chaplains and professional counselors. Modern Lukes (physicians) and Pauls (ministers) were working together there, Roberts told the world. He joined the prayer partners from time to time to pray for the sick and added credibility to the work of the healing teams. Patients and families from all parts of the United States and many parts of the world came to receive whole person medical care at the City of Faith.

The City of Faith was a dynamic place of medicine, prayer, and healing teams. Speedier healings and expedited discharges were common events at the City of Faith, but it was also a place of pain, suffering, and death, like any other hospital, but Oral Roberts had a balanced theology of life and death. He believed that healing could take place through God’s natural and supernatural streams and it could happen instantly, gradually, or ultimately in the resurrection. Medical, nursing, and theology students were enrolled in training programs to prepare them for healing team work around the world.

The training of fourth-year medical students was unique at the City

of Faith as they were required to take a course titled “Healing Team Concepts,” which required students to read theological materials and the history of medical missions in addition to their normal medical assignments. It was co-taught by a physician and a chaplain. This writer had the opportunity to be the teaching partner in this course. Medical students were required to visit patients in their traditional white coats during morning hours. They were to visit the same patients later in the day wearing the gold colored gowns assigned to the chaplains. Finally, they were to write papers comparing and contrasting their experiences as physicians and ministers and integrating their insights into their practice as physicians. Students routinely reported hearing mostly lists of physical symptoms and medical complaints in the mornings and hearing stories of losses and heartaches during their ministerial visits. They felt forced to see the patients as vulnerable human beings and to listen to their compelling stories to offer them the best medical response from a whole person perspective. Many students considered this a life transforming experience of dealing with the social power assigned to them as physicians and learning to include other healing team members in meaningful ways to merge medicine and prayer. To many, it was an exercise in dealing with the social power and privilege of physicians and the role-related powerlessness of other professionals for the benefit of their patients.

Prayer was a part of everything that happened at the City of Faith. Patients were prayed for at all important areas within the clinic and the hospital. Admission staff prayed for patients at the entry points. Doctors and nurses prayed. Prayer partners prayed day and night. The social workers and pharmacists prayed as patients were discharged. Healing testimonials abounded. Speedy healings, unexplainable recoveries, and plain miracles were happening, but pain, suffering, and death were also present. Oral Roberts reminded the staff to consider the City of Faith as the modern invalid tent that accompanied his larger tents to accommodate patients who were too sick to be brought into the big tents.

It is well known that the City of Faith did not succeed as a financially viable institutional initiative. Many things contributed to its closing in 1989. The local civic power centers were against it, claiming the city did not need additional hospital beds, although thousands of beds have been added since then. The 1980s mega-scandals of

televangelists cast a shadow on every evangelist, including Oral Roberts. The hospital reimbursement system drastically changed nationally to what was called Diagnostic Related Groupings (DRGs), which limited payments to hospitals based on each diagnosis and predetermined number of payable days for hospitalization regardless of the actual cost of treatment. Medical education was also a very costly business impacting the university's budget. There may be many other reasons for the failure of the City of Faith, but the underlying philosophy of whole person healing was not one of those. In fact, in recognition of his pioneering work as a promoter of whole person health, the College of Chaplains (now Association of Professional Chaplains) invited Oral Roberts to be the keynote speaker at its annual conference held in San Diego in 1983. This writer as a prayer partner (chaplain) at the City of Faith was certified as a Fellow in the College of Chaplains at that convention.

Many people who severely criticized Roberts for his fundraising efforts related to the City of Faith did not know that he was raising those funds to give full-tuition scholarships to medical students to let them sign up for medical missions after graduation. Seeing that the medical graduates of ORU were not electing to go on missions due to their large school loans, Roberts promised tuition-free education to medical students, one year of tuition paid for one year of post-graduation commitment to the mission field. This writer knows individuals who benefited from this offer and fulfilled their obligations after graduation from the medical school.

Although the City of Faith experiment failed, its impact—the impact of a healing evangelist on the medical field—has been tremendous. Graduates of ORU Medical School are practicing whole person medicine in several nations. Many of them are involved in training medical residents in whole person medicine and conducting medical missions. The story of the former City of Faith physician Dr. John Crouch and the In His Image Family Practice Residency he founded in Tulsa with three other colleagues³² from ORU School of Medicine faculty is one case in point. Dr. Crouch was the head of Family Medicine at the City of Faith. When the City of Faith closed, he led the founding of the In His Image Residency Program to continue the legacy of whole person medicine in his medical group practice and through a certified family medicine

residency training program. According to Dr. Crouch, the mission of In His Image is to improve health and meet spiritual needs of patients by:

- 1) Training Christian physicians in Family Medicine Residency Program;
- 2) participating in worldwide medical missions and medical education;
- and 3) serving the local underserved populations in the greater Tulsa area.

Several former City of Faith physicians are practicing family medicine and training medical residents in “missions minded medicine” at In His Image. They have created a network of global medical residencies in multiple nations, including Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, and China, to promote whole person health care. Conferences and consultations are held to train native doctors as a part of seeing whole person medical education as missions in places like Aswan, Egypt, and Horn of Africa. Second- and third-year residents in Tulsa are encouraged to join the International Medical Conference teams. Many of them do by preparing and presenting lectures and teaching workshops. They interact with local medical students and residents with an eye to exploring if God is calling them for medical ministry to that people group! They have been involved in disaster relief work in Rwanda (massacre), Indonesia (tsunami), Pakistan (earthquake), Myanmar (hurricane), China (earthquake), Haiti (earthquake), the Philippines (refugees), and Northern Iraq (refugees). In His Image Residency graduates now serve as ambassadors of whole person medical care and healing in many nations in Asia, Europe, Africa, and Central and South America.

This is the story of just one former department of the City of Faith. Similar stories of global impact involving individuals and organizations connected to the City of Faith abound. Meanwhile, holistic medical care has become a matter of concern for the entire field of medicine since the days of the City of Faith. Those who scoffed at the prayer and medicine conferences held at ORU in the 1980s are no longer laughing at spirituality and healing conferences held now at places like Harvard University. The field of medicine was challenged by Oral Roberts not to consider the patient as just an organ or disease. He challenged them not to see patients as one-dimensional entities with symptoms, but to see them and treat them as whole persons. Unlike the pre-1980s, spiritual care and chaplaincy are no longer an appendix in most medical facilities in America. A whole person perspective is routinely discussed today at major medical

and nursing schools.

It appears that Roberts' encounters with the interdenominational charismatic world impacted his theology of healing—both Pentecostal and Charismatic—and that impact was reflected in his teaching on wholeness. He became a champion of whole person education and healing. Fully incorporating his Pentecostal theology of divine healing into the mid-twentieth-century charismatic emphasis on the charismata and signs and wonders as the manifestations of the “Holy Spirit in the NOW,” Roberts articulated a theology of whole person healing. Some of the new emphases of the theology of whole person healing as taught by Oral Roberts are summarized and listed here:

- Health and illness are both dynamic in nature. Health is not merely the absence of illness, but a wholeness of being.
- Wholeness involves every aspect of one's life: physical, spiritual, emotional, relational, economic, and environmental.
- The human body, mind, and spirit are interwoven at profoundly deep levels. Each aspect of human life interacts with and influences every other aspect.
- Personal attitudes, priorities, and choices are significantly related to one's wholeness or lack of health.
- The faith of an individual is a great resource for health. An individual can contribute to his or her own healing by implementing a point of contact or initiating a seed-faith process.
- God is a good God and he wants his creation to be whole.
- God is the source of all healing. Whether healing results from medical intervention, faith-filled prayer, natural biological restorative processes, or a combination of these, all healing comes from God.
- The Holy Spirit is at work in a believer's life and divine intervention in his or her life during times of need is always a possibility.

- God determines the timing of healing. God heals in three different ways: instantly, gradually, and ultimately in the resurrection.
- Some people are not healed physically; every individual must die once. Death is acceptable to the believer when it happens at the appointed time (Heb 9:27).
- Suffering is a reality of life in this fallen world; suffering of believers cannot always be explained.
- Healing ministry is not limited to some selected individuals. Spirit-filled Christians are called to go into every person's world with God's healing power.

Conclusion

Oral Roberts was a servant of God who was used to spread the message of God's healing power across the world in the twentieth century. He is considered the premier healing evangelist who experienced God's miraculous healing power in his own life. Coming from socially and economically poor circumstances, he caught a vision of the possibility of being blessed with salvation, health, and prosperity in the name of Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit. He developed revolutionary theological concepts such as point of contact, seed-faith, and prayer language, envisioned the use of television as a powerful medium for ministry, and founded a university to "impact the world with God's healing." He was a man of faith and hope, a gifted communicator, and a pioneer practitioner of whole person education and healing. His healing ministry was motivated by his love for suffering humanity and his willingness to obey a sense of calling and the command of Jesus to preach, teach, and heal. His life and ministry have touched the globe and the impact will be felt for many generations to come. His theology of healing was truly Pentecostal, charismatic, and global. Oral Roberts was a practical theologian who developed a well-defined theology of whole person healing that can be characterized as Pentecostal, charismatic, and Spirit-empowered.



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Notes

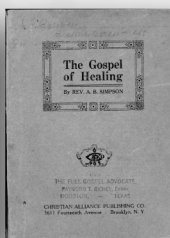
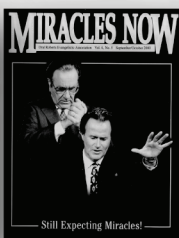
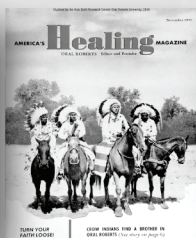
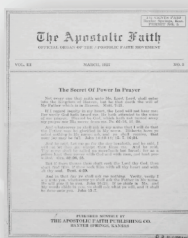
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God said to me, "Build me a university on the Holy Spirit" – Oral Roberts

ORU

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ORAL ROBERTS: A MAN OF THE SPIRIT

DANIEL D. ISGRIGG

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Key Words: *Oral Roberts, baptism in the Holy Spirit, healing evangelism, Pentecostalism, Oral Roberts University, speaking in tongues, prayer language*

Abstract

This article explores the role that the experience of the Pentecostal baptism in the Holy Spirit played in shaping the ministry of Oral Roberts. It charts the development and importance of his experience from his early life and ministry, his launch into healing evangelism, and the founding of Oral Roberts University.

Introduction

Oral Roberts has rightfully been recognized as one of the most important religious figures in the twentieth century.¹ During the 1950s, Roberts became a household name through his large-scale tent crusades, innovative television programs, and dynamic preaching ministry. Over the last few decades, Roberts has received attention from scholars for his role as America's Healing Evangelist.² While Roberts' healing theology shaped his generation, there was another theological focus that permeated his preaching and teaching: the Pentecostal baptism in the Holy Spirit. Pentecostal historian, Vinson Synan, calls Oral Roberts the "Son of the Pentecostal Movement, Father of the Charismatic Movement" because of the profound influence he had on the Spirit-empowered movement.³ Reared in the home of a Pentecostal Holiness

pastor and evangelist, when Roberts launched into his own evangelistic ministry he adopted the typical full gospel message of Pentecostal revivalists summed up in the five-fold gospel, which was the heart of Pentecostal theology.⁴ Fellow Pentecostal Holiness evangelist and friend, G. H. Montgomery, summarized Roberts' theology:

With [Roberts], salvation is being saved. Healing is being healed. Holiness is getting right and living right. Jesus is the Savior of the world. "Our God is a good God and the devil is a bad devil." Add to that the baptism with the Holy Ghost in pentecostal fullness, and you have the theology of Oral Roberts, the sum and substance of his preaching.⁵

As an evangelist, Roberts' ministry focused on more than healing; he also led people into the experiences of salvation, sanctification, and the baptism in the Spirit. As Roberts' popularity and influence began to transcend traditional Pentecostal boundaries in the charismatic renewal of the 1960s and 1970s, he continued to proclaim passionately the importance of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In fact, at every turn in the development of his ministry, Roberts' focus on the baptism in the Spirit propelled him to each new adventure, including his launch into healing evangelism, influence within the charismatic renewal, and the founding of Oral Roberts University.

This article will look at the important role the baptism in the Holy Spirit has played in the shaping of Oral Roberts' healing ministry. It will begin by exploring his own experience of Spirit baptism, the role this experience played in his initial ministry as an evangelist and pastor, and how the Spirit became the catalyst that led to his shift to becoming a healing evangelist in 1947. Next, I will show how Roberts' Spirit baptism became the primary force that enabled his healing ministry. Finally, I will explore the role his Spirit baptism played in the founding of Oral Roberts University. While a full study of Roberts' pneumatology is still needed, this study will seek to lay the groundwork for raising awareness of the indispensable place the baptism in the Holy Spirit had in the healing ministry of Oral Roberts.

Oral Roberts' Pentecostal Experience

Oral Roberts grew up in a somewhat typical impoverished Pentecostal family in the Indian Territory of Oklahoma. His parents, Ellis and Claudius, were sharecroppers who received the baptism in the Spirit when a frontier evangelist traveled to Pontotoc County, Oklahoma.⁶ The Pentecostal message preached at these revival meetings transformed their lives as they were saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Spirit. So significant was his parents' experience that they surrendered themselves to the ministry as Pentecostal Holiness pastors and evangelists. As a child, Oral Roberts traveled with his father to conduct brush arbor revivals around Oklahoma. Roberts recalls the many hours he spent sitting on wooden benches listening to Pentecostal preaching by his father and seeing his mother minister to the sick in the sawdust of the altars.⁷ Despite his Christian upbringing, at the age of sixteen, Roberts ran away from God and from his parents for a year until a bout with tuberculosis forced him to return home. For weeks, Oral's parents prayed by his bedside for Oral to "get saved." Then one night, with his father by his bedside, the power of the Spirit came upon him and he finally surrendered his life to Christ. But he was not yet healed. Not only that, he knew he was missing something: the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In July of 1935, Roberts sent his testimony to *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*.

I am happy and free because I have just been saved and sanctified. It is so glorious that I want everyone to know it I feel the call to preach very definitely, but before I recover and enter the work I must have the abiding Comforter, the Holy Ghost, to comfort me and help me overcome my infirmities.⁸

A few weeks later, Oral's family drove him to a revival being conducted by George Moncey in a nearby town. The suffering young Roberts was the last in the healing line, but as Moncey anointed him with oil and rebuked the tuberculosis, instantly he felt the power of God touch his hemorrhaging lungs.⁹ A few months later, in August 1935, he attended the annual Pentecostal Holiness Camp Meeting

in Sulphur, Oklahoma, hoping to receive the baptism in the Spirit.¹⁰ He was not disappointed. At the age of 17, he received the baptism with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues.¹¹ He later described this experience.

I remember the night I was baptized with the Holy Ghost. He took hold of my tongue, and I spoke in a manner I had never known in my life. I did not understand one word I said, for it was an unknown tongue, but I knew the Holy Spirit was speaking through me to God, and he gave me strength and relief. Inwardly, I knew I was praising and magnifying God, but it was the Holy Ghost who was vocally expressing my thoughts to the Lord.¹²

Although he knew he had received the baptism in the Spirit, he later lamented that he received little instruction in how to use the gift in his life. Roberts admits that he rarely spoke in tongues after this initial event and it eventually “faded away.”¹³ Roberts’ experience was not at all uncommon for Pentecostals in this era because many did not believe the act of speaking in tongues was under a person’s control.¹⁴ He comments, “I suppose I kept waiting for God to do it all . . . I kept waiting to be overwhelmed, for the new tongues to come pouring forth without my cooperation.”¹⁵ Although he did not fully understand the gift, he recognized that it was necessary for him to be qualified for full-time Pentecostal preaching ministry.

The Spirit of the Pastor and Evangelist

Shortly after his healing and Spirit baptism, Roberts joined his father in evangelistic meetings around Oklahoma. Soon he was ready to launch out on his own and received his license as a Pentecostal Holiness minister at the age of 18. During his first three years as an evangelist, Roberts reported 400 were saved, 125 sanctified, and ninety-eight received the baptism in the Holy Ghost.¹⁶ Despite his success and growing popularity, Oral and Evelyn were newly married with a young daughter, Rebecca, and managed only a subsistence living.¹⁷ To try to

provide more for his family, Roberts accepted his first pastorate at an independent Pentecostal church in Fuquay Springs, North Carolina, in November of 1941. In spring of 1942, he and fellow Oklahoma evangelist, Mildred Wicks, held a three-week revival in which fifty-three were saved, eighteen were sanctified, and three “went through” to the baptism in the Holy Ghost.¹⁸ Roberts was seeing a good deal of success as a pastor and even hosted a regular Sunday morning broadcast on a Raleigh, North Carolina, radio station. However, when the church refused to join the Pentecostal Holiness denomination, Roberts’ stay in Fuquay Springs was cut short and in September 1942 he accepted an assignment to pastor the Pentecostal Holiness church in Shawnee, Oklahoma.¹⁹ In these early days, Roberts showed loyalty to his denomination and their doctrines and was on his way to “a bright future in the denomination.”²⁰

During his time as the pastor in Shawnee, Roberts became a regular contributor to the denominational paper, *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, writing articles that focused on encouraging his fellow ministers to pray for a Holy Ghost inspired revival. Roberts also wrote regularly in the *East Oklahoma Conference News (EOCN)*, where he proclaimed, “The greatest need of the hour for the conference is to have a revival to break out in every church.”²² The revivalistic tone of articles gained him notoriety among the Oklahoma Conference and in September 1943 he was asked to serve as the editor of the *EOCN*.²³ As the new editor, Roberts continued his emphasis on the need for revival, taking to the front page of the paper to ask, “Will God Repeat the Upper Room Revival?”

For the past two months your editor has been keenly conscious of the working of God’s Spirit in his own heart. In prayer, in the pulpit and in the parish I have been led to think more seriously on our need of Pentecost and God’s desire to send the Comforter to us than ever before.²⁴

Roberts lamented to his readers that although the movement began as a “latter rain” outpouring, he observed, “there seems to be a lack of desire on the part of many for the Holy Ghost.”²⁵ He continued

to accept invitations to do revivals and by the time Roberts left the Shawnee church, his small church had recorded “119 saved, 50 sanctified and 32 received the Holy Ghost.”²⁶ Although by all accounts he was a successful pastor, it was clear in his sermons and writings that at the core of his identity he was an evangelist, a reality that would ultimately ensure that Roberts would not be a long-term pastor.

The Spirit and the Healing Ministry

In 1945, Roberts left the church in Shawnee to pursue evangelistic work in North Carolina and for a short time took churches in Toccoa, Georgia, and Radford, Virginia.²⁷ But before long, he brought his family back to Oklahoma to attend college and in 1946 became pastor of the Pentecostal Holiness church in Enid.²⁸ Although Roberts was fairly successful in the eyes of his denomination, he was already searching for something more.²⁹ During a sociology class at Phillips University in Enid, he heard God speak. “Son, don’t be like other men. Don’t be like any denomination. Be like Jesus and heal like he did.”³⁰ For the next month, Roberts read through the Gospels and Acts to discover what gave Jesus his healing power. He recalls,

It was during those days that He reminded me that I had received the baptism with the Holy Ghost in 1935. He asked me if I knew what I had. When I replied that in all honesty that I did not, He reminded me that having the Holy Ghost was like having Jesus physically by my side; and, therefore, I could go forth and take His healing power to my generation.³¹

For the first time, Roberts understood that having the baptism in the Holy Spirit was the same as “having Jesus Christ in the flesh by my side.”³² He realized the baptism in the Spirit was not a denominational distinctive or even an important religious experience; it was a divine command from God.

This is the Pentecostal charge . . . it is the same today that it was then. We can no more go forth to do battle for the Lord with resistless power without the baptism of the Holy Ghost than the disciples could. His command for them to “tarry until” they were endued with Power from on high is His command for every one of us today.³³

From that point on, there was no going back for Roberts. What he had received through the baptism in the Spirit was all he needed to propel him into the healing ministry.

In May 1947, he set out to conduct evangelistic meetings with his new revelation about God’s power.³⁴ In June, Roberts teamed up with his old friend, Mildred Wicks, to conduct his first large-scale healing campaign in Newnan, Georgia.³⁵ Tabbed as the “greatest revival in the history of Newnan Church,” the crowd was so overwhelming that services had to be moved to the 730-seat municipal auditorium. *The Advocate* reports,

More than 500 people were anointed for healing and scores testified in writing that they were healed of cancer, heart trouble, goiter, loss of speech, deafness, blindness, lameness, ulcers, paralysis, double heartbeat, and other afflictions. Devils were cast out, minds were restored, souls were saved, sanctified, baptized with the Holy Ghost and hundreds were spiritually revived according to their own testimony.³⁶

Over the next four years, Roberts developed a methodology for his healing ministry grounded in the reality of the living presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. From that point on, all of the souls saved, the bodies healed, and the lives rescued through his ministry hinged on his identity as a man of the Spirit.³⁷

Roberts never considered himself to be a “faith healer,” as if he possessed some special power or gift; rather it was the power of the Holy Spirit that made healing possible. In fact, he even avoided calling it a gift, referring to it instead in terms of a “manifestation to meet

the needs of people” that, after it was delivered, made a full circle and “returned to God the Holy Spirit.”³⁸ He comments, “Once the manifestation of the gifts subsides, I am keenly aware that I am reduced to a position of lesser power.”³⁹ Because of this, in every healing line he would remind the people that he was an ordinary man. He would say, “I have no power in myself to heal; it is Jesus who heals. If you are looking to Oral Roberts to heal you, you will be disappointed.”⁴⁰ Roberts was able to overcome his feelings of ordinariness and insecurities only through waiting on the Holy Spirit to manifest his presence before he would attempt to go on the platform to minister.⁴¹ Roberts also would spend time praying in the Spirit before each service, a practice that he believed oriented him and prepared him to cooperate with the Spirit to minister healing to the hurting.⁴²

The Holy Spirit was not only the essential ingredient of his personal life and ministry; it would become an important aspect in his ministry in his crusades. While traveling on a plane to a crusade in Miami, Florida, in January of 1950, Roberts heard God audibly speak to him.⁴³ God said, “My servant . . . this year you are to emphasize the Holy Ghost and tell the people to expect Jesus to come during 1950.”⁴⁴ This revelation marked a new moment for Roberts. He was beginning to see himself not only as a healing evangelist, but also as a Holy Spirit evangelist who would bring a new generation into the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The magnitude of this new calling was so transformative to him that when it came time for him to take the stage, he launched into the crusade “like a man from another world with the anointing of a personal, abiding Comforter.”⁴⁵ Members of his ministry team noticed “a new vigor and authority” that they had not seen before.⁴⁶ Roberts’ message the first night of the crusade was “Why You Must Receive the Holy Ghost” and at the conclusion of the message he invited people to come be filled with the Spirit.⁴⁷ Quickly, hundreds of people, many from various denominations, filled the altars to seek the baptism with the Spirit. The dramatic response in the crusades throughout the year confirmed the word of the Lord from that plane ride, which led Roberts to prophesy eagerly, “During 1950, I expect the greatest meeting the world has ever known, bring forth miracles unsurpassed, of mighty

outpourings of the baptism of the Holy Ghost and of the Holy Ghost dividing with nine gifts of the Spirit severally as he wills.”⁴⁸

Because his method of using a healing line was primarily designed for rapidly praying for the sick, Roberts began utilizing a seekers tent where he would invite seekers to come after the meeting to seek the Holy Ghost. Over the rest of the crusades of 1950, the tent was overflowing with seekers for the baptism in the Spirit. The Jacksonville crusade in March was met with even greater results than Miami as “thousands” went to the prayer tent to seek for Spirit baptism.⁴⁹ Two months later in Richmond, the ministry reported, “Hundreds prayed through to Bible holiness and the baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire. As high as 1,500 sought the Holy Ghost in one night in the huge prayer tent set up behind the main tent.”⁵⁰ In one night in Oklahoma City, an estimated 2,000 came forward to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ By May, Roberts was reporting that as many as fifty people in each service received Spirit baptism and that is was not unusual for “a thousand people to receive the Holy Ghost and fire in one of our 16-day meetings.”⁵² In total 1,176,000 people attended an Oral Roberts campaign in 1950 and although no official statistics were given, it is conservatively estimated from these reports that upwards of 5,000 people may have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit and perhaps ten times that number became seekers of the experience.⁵³ This emphasis was, however, short lived, as in 1953, Roberts turned his attention toward his “Million Souls” campaign.⁵⁴ The impulse to reach more lost people was certainly a consequence of the 1950 emphasis on the Holy Spirit, but it also led to the decrease in emphasis on the Holy Spirit within his preaching and his crusades in the latter part of the decade.

The Spirit and the Healing of the Church

By 1957, Roberts began feeling like the crusade ministry was beginning to level off and he was starting to get restless.⁵⁵ He admits, “No matter how large the crowds grew or how many thousands were healed, or how many souls were saved, I still felt a certain emptiness that would not go away.”⁵⁶ Feeling the need to begin to dream again, he reflected to his

readers, “The most dangerous place in the world for Oral Roberts to stop is right here and now—right where he is In 1959, you must not allow yourself to park either by your failures or successes This is God’s message to all men everywhere. ‘Don’t park here!’”⁵⁷

With these words, a new era of emphasis on the Holy Spirit emerged in Oral Roberts’ theology that would reach beyond the borders of his Pentecostal heritage. During the mid-1950s, Roberts benefitted greatly from his involvement with the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship International (FGBFI), which he helped to start.⁵⁸ He was drawn to the ecumenical nature of the movement that was primarily focused on the Holy Spirit’s work in believers’ lives. The success of FGBFI to bring renewal to believers in all denominations was mirrored in Roberts’ crusades, which were initially populated by Pentecostal believers. By the early 1960s, with the novelty of healing crusades on the wane, his restlessness led to a rediscovery of the importance of the topic of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

In 1961, Roberts began once again to study the Holy Spirit, only this time he wanted to understand more fully the value of speaking in tongues.⁵⁹ Roberts made several discoveries that revolutionized his perspective about the value of speaking in tongues. First, as he studied the life of Paul, he realized tongues should be frequent rather than infrequent. Although completely committed to the doctrine of tongues as evidence of the baptism in the Spirit, he admitted that he “rarely spoke in tongues” in his early healing ministry.⁶⁰ Roberts grew up in a time in the Pentecostal church when tongues were thought not to be at the believer’s control.⁶¹ Rather than waiting for particular moments of inspiration to exercise the gift of tongues, he discovered that speaking in tongues was intended to be a “normal experience” as part of one’s relationship with God.⁶² It is from this revelation that Roberts developed the concept of tongues as the “language of the Spirit” and coined the term “personal prayer language.”⁶³ Second, Roberts found that increasing the frequency of praying in the Spirit had a direct influence on his ministry, supplying him with “more power in my ministry, more self-control, more eagerness and release.”⁶⁴ Speaking in tongues not only increased Roberts’ ministry of healing, he believed it increased one’s capacity to receive healing in the healing lines.⁶⁵ Another

new revelation for Roberts was the concept of speaking in tongues as the “release of the Spirit,” which was added to the concept of initial evidence.⁶⁶ He said, “[Speaking in tongues] is more than an evidence, more than a sign, more than for personal release in edification. It is also power release.”⁶⁷ The benefit of speaking in tongues, then, is that every time one prays, they release edification and power.

Following his 1961 pneumatological reawakening, the baptism in the Holy Spirit became one of the central emphases in his publications. The January 1962 issue of *Abundant Life* was dedicated entirely to the baptism in the Holy Spirit, something that had not been done since 1950. As the nation was becoming ever more embroiled in turmoil, Roberts felt that the Holy Spirit’s power was needed then more than ever. The new emphasis on the Holy Spirit, Carl Hamilton insisted, was not new at all considering “Brother Roberts has always credited the success of his ministry to the anointing of God’s Holy Spirit.”⁶⁸ However, he added, it did mark a new emphasis in that it was “being placed in a greater way than ever before.” His new practice of exercising the gift of praying in the Spirit was generating within his life a “greater anointing and a greater filling of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁹ Issues of *Abundant Life* also shared more individual stories of people who were baptized in the Spirit.⁷⁰ The whole ministry team seemed to be reinvigorated by the Holy Spirit emphasis.⁷¹

The newfound power and results in his meetings convinced Roberts that the church was on the verge of a new outpouring of the Spirit and that his ministry was playing a large role in the eschatological mission of the Spirit to bring about the healing of the church.⁷² After years of jealousy and criticism from those within his own Pentecostal family, Roberts was ready to spread his wings and become a father to the charismatic renewal of the entire church. He declared, “Pentecost is not a denomination. It is an experience. This is your hour to receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost. This is it.”⁷³ He believed that what the Spirit was doing in this generation had transcended denominational boundaries.

A great number of people in unexpected places in life are accepting the light on the truth of the baptism of the Holy Ghost today, and many are receiving the experience. Some of these are

ministers of the gospel, pastors of churches in denominations, which have not before taught the baptism of the Holy Ghost. All over the world this move is seen; people are seeing the power in the lives of those who have the experience; and their own lives have been blessed and revitalized as they have realized their need of the Holy Spirit and have received the experience. In our own crusades, hundreds are awaiting and receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost in our morning prayer meetings.⁷⁴

Roberts believed his crusades were not only a place of healing of the physical body, they were ground zero for the charismatic renewal that would heal the whole Body of Christ. As crusade director, Hart Armstrong reported, “Thousands are responding to the new move of the Holy Spirit among the denominations, and are coming to the crusades to seek the baptism with the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁵ For the next two years, the great hunger for the Holy Spirit convinced Roberts that the “greatest Holy Ghost revival since the day of Pentecost is about to break upon the Church.”⁷⁶

The Spirit and the University

When Roberts began to sense a shift in his ministry in 1959, he knew it was towards something greater than simply using his crusades to bring people into the baptism in the Spirit. It was a whole paradigm shift in his ministry. In June 1960, Roberts announced to his partners, “God has spoken to me again.”⁷⁷ His new plan was to open a “soul-winning training program” in order to increase his overseas evangelistic ministry. The same month as the announcement, Roberts was having dinner with Pat Robertson when God spoke to Roberts these famous words:

Raise up your students to hear My voice, to go where My light is dim, where My voice is heard small and where My healing power is not known. To go to the uttermost bounds of the earth. Their work will exceed yours and in this I am well pleased.⁷⁸

These words reminded Roberts of what God said to him on his death bed at 17 years old: “Son, I am going to heal you and you are going to take my healing power to your generation. You are to build me a university and built it upon My authority and upon the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁹ With these words, a new era of emphasis on the Holy Spirit emerged in Oral Roberts’ theology.

In May 1962, the vision for a university became clearer as Roberts announced the construction of a new building in south Tulsa to house not simply a soul-winning program, as was previously announced, but America’s healing evangelist was going to build a university. Roberts told his partners, “To further fulfill God’s call upon my life to take His healing power to my generation, I feel the time has come to undertake by faith the greatest and most far-reaching step of all for the salvation of souls and to perpetuate this ministry that God has given me and committed to my trust. That is to build the ‘ORAL ROBERTS UNIVERSITY OF EVANGELISM.’”⁸⁰

To open the new University of Evangelism, Roberts hosted a week-long Ministers Seminar devoted to the topic of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit that was attended by more than 350 ministers from eleven different denominations. The goal was to simulate the type of classes Roberts envisioned would take place in the new university. The seminars were also a great opportunity to promote the university, which was set to open two years later.⁸² Oral Roberts, R. O. Corvin, David DuPlessis, Rex Humbard, and a host of other ministers shared in various classes all centered on the Holy Spirit. The climax of the seminar was the final evening when Oral Roberts laid hands on everyone in attendance to “release the power of the Spirit” in their lives.

The second Ministers Seminar, hosted in July 1963, yielded even greater results. One attendee declared, “I believe this is the greatest step forward to meet the spiritual needs of the world than anything that has happened since the Day of Pentecost.”⁸⁴ This time, Roberts included some charismatic speakers, such as Howard M. Ervin, a Spirit-filled Baptist pastor who earned a Th.D. from Princeton and who joined the founding faculty of the School of Theology at ORU in 1965.⁸⁵ The sessions were marked by anointed teachings and wonderful times of singing and praying in the Spirit. While most of the ministers were already Spirit-filled, one

great outcome of the ministry time was that “ministers who had not spoken in tongues for years, and some who had not spoken with spiritual utterance since the day they were baptized with the Holy Spirit were experiencing an uninterrupted flow of divine language.”⁸⁶ Similar “Youth Seminars” for prospective college students were designed to give a taste of the spiritual atmosphere that they would encounter at ORU, which were some of the earliest prototypes of the college weekend tradition.⁸⁷ These seminars in the seminal years of the university sent a very clear signal to the Pentecostal and charismatic community: Oral Roberts University will be a school that is built on the Holy Spirit.

The task of building a university from the ground up was overwhelming to Roberts. Once again he had to draw upon the resources he had in the Holy Spirit to lead the way. The only thing he knew to do was to walk the barren acres of the plot of land at 81st and Lewis and pray in the Spirit. Roberts recalls, “I was literally groaning and praying and crying out, ‘Oh God, help me! Show me the way!’”⁸⁸ Each time the Spirit would well up in him, he would pray in tongues and then ask God for the interpretation. This process was “exhilarating” for Roberts and gave him a hunger to pray regularly in this manner.⁸⁹ As he received the interpretation of his prayers, he testified “the Lord revealed to me the most astonishing knowledge and showed me the broad outline of how to build a university.”⁹⁰ This practice of “praying in tongues with interpretation” became a distinctive feature of his pneumatology.⁹¹

From that point forward, many of the details of the university, including the shape of buildings and the design of the curriculum, would be revealed to Roberts through interpreting what God was speaking through the “language of the Spirit.”⁹² One specific aspect of the campus that was directly revealed through the interpretation of the Spirit was the Prayer Tower. God instructed Roberts to put it in the center of campus to represent that the Spirit will be the “center of the University.”⁹³ The two-hundred-foot futuristic cross-shaped design was crowned with an “eternal flame” symbolizing the baptism in the Holy Spirit.⁹⁴ The dramatic height of the tower would serve as a constant reminder to students and faculty that ORU was built on prayer, particularly the practice of praying in tongues with interpretation. The

tower would also house an “upper room” designed to introduce a new generation to the power of the Spirit.⁹⁵

In addition to these external designs, Roberts designed the curriculum to reflect the centrality of the Spirit in relation to the intellect in his concept of whole person education. He comments, “In this atmosphere of educational excellence and Holy Spirit guidance, a philosophy of total education will be carried on for our children.”⁹⁶ In order to ensure that ORU would maintain its Holy Spirit focus, Roberts recruited the finest Spirit-filled Ph.D.s he could find and instituted a policy that required all faculty to be baptized in the Spirit and committed to the Spirit-filled life.⁹⁷ Roberts knew that some mainline schools had educated faculties that had no spiritual life. Then there were Pentecostal schools that had the Spirit, but the faculty were not highly educated. Roberts set out to do what no other Christian college had managed to accomplish: assemble a faculty that consisted entirely of professors who were “Spirit filled and holding a doctorate or masters.”⁹⁸ From the top to the bottom, ORU would be “built on the Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit in the Now

In the days after Oral Roberts University opened, the demands of being a university president occupied much of Roberts’ attention. On campus, the student body was exposed to Roberts’ ministry and teachings through weekly chapel meetings and campus revivals. After folding the tent for the last time in 1967, Roberts was committed to raising up students and empowering the next generation to take healing to the “uttermost bounds of the earth.” Born out of the original vision of the University of Evangelism, Roberts wanted the university to focus on world evangelism and mobilizing “World Action” healing teams. These teams of students, led by Spiritual Life Director Tommy Tyson, were organized to take Roberts’ message of healing and baptism in the Spirit to the world. Roberts described,

World Action Team is a new term which God gave to me a few weeks ago. The World Action Teams will be ORU students, sent to different nations to use their professions—whether doctors,

lawyers, teachers or ministers—to further the Gospel of Christ. Where there's a crisis nation, look for a World Action Team from ORU—in schools, hospitals, villages and cities, working with the missionaries.⁹⁹

This new mission Roberts viewed as the ultimate fulfillment of God's word in 1947 and perhaps his final mission. He says, "I see the remaining time left as the most important opportunity of my life to preach the Gospel, to win souls, to heal the sick, to lead people into the infilling of the Holy Spirit, to expect miracles across the earth."¹⁰⁰ What began as a vision for his own life would now be replicated in his students. To prepare these students to go into "every man's world," Roberts would first need to hold meetings on campus to encourage students to be filled with the Spirit. Beyond just teaching them a doctrine, Roberts wanted to impart to these students the Spirit's power by demonstrating the ministry of laying on of hands and how to release their faith.¹⁰¹

The early momentum created at ORU received a sudden shock when in March 1968, Oral Roberts announced his intention to join the Methodist Church. Having maintained his credentials with the Pentecostal Holiness Church for over thirty years, the ecumenical appeal of his ministry had reached a point that it had transcended the Pentecostal base to include a wide range of denominations. This move raised speculation that perhaps Roberts was moving from his classical Pentecostal views to a more charismatic view of Spirit baptism.¹⁰² Roberts assured the faculty, staff, and students of ORU,

I am a believer in Bible holiness . . . I am completely committed to the Pentecostal outpouring, the baptism in the Holy Ghost, and the gifts of the Spirit in the fullest meaning of those terms. And I have carefully inquired on more than one occasion with the bishop and the top officials with whom I have talked if they understood what I am and what they would expect from me. And they have said in essence . . . we need a strong Pentecostal infusion and you epitomize this in the world. And we urgently

and desperately need this outpouring within our movement
I am Pentecostal and will be until the day I die I believe if I
can to be a Christian gentleman and exhibit the love of the Spirit
toward my Pentecostal brethren, that over a period of time it can
be demonstrated that I am a Pentecostal through and through.¹⁰³

Roberts' primary motivation in changing denominations was not doctrinal; it was in order to be able to expand his ministry of bringing healing and the baptism in the Spirit to the "historic church." While the move was ultimately detrimental to Roberts' support base, it was thought to be in service to God's call to bring healing power to his generation.

Over the next few years, as some were still questioning if Roberts was shifting his theology, a new opportunity to establish the centrality of the baptism in the Holy Spirit arose at ORU. In 1972, Oral Roberts University received its first endowed chair when a wealthy British businessman left money in his will for the establishment of an academic "Chair of the Holy Spirit" at ORU.¹⁰⁵ The recipient of this chair was, of course, Oral Roberts. From this funding, Roberts created a class called "The Holy Spirit in the Now" that would be taught to the students at ORU over the next decade. The classes were filmed live in the Mabee Center before more than 1,500 students each semester and included Roberts' teaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, releasing the "prayer language," the gifts of the Spirit, and other topics about living the abundant life. From 1972–1982, "The Holy Spirit in the Now" became one of the signature features of academic life at ORU in which thousands of ORU students sat under Roberts' teaching on the Holy Spirit. Roberts also distributed several hundred thousand copies of the transcripts of the classes to his ministry partners free of charge and offered audio recordings of the tapes for a seed-faith gift.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

This article has sought to chart the role of the baptism in the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Oral Roberts. While it will be left to other studies to outline more fully the specifics of his pneumatological

views, we have seen that Oral Roberts was a man of the Spirit whose ministry was shaped by the experience of the baptism in the Spirit. While healing certainly was at the center of his ministry, the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the distinctive feature of speaking in tongues was a consistent emphasis threaded throughout the entirety of his career. Every major ministry turning point in Roberts' ministry was marked by his rediscovery or reemphasis on the Holy Spirit in his life. It solidified his calling to ministry, launched him into the healing ministry, provided the platform for being a leader in the charismatic renewal, and inspired the dream of building a university.

While Oral Roberts will always be known as a healing evangelist, this study has demonstrated that there were actually two distinct but interdependent aspects of Roberts' ministry. During the first phase of his crusade ministry, healing and evangelism were the primary emphases, but the ministry of the baptism in the Spirit was certainly present and many thousands sought and received it in his crusades. As a revivalist, Roberts knew that the power of the Holy Spirit would change lives, save souls, and bring healing to the hurting. Following the establishment of ORU, Roberts entered into the second phase in which the Holy Spirit became primary and healing became secondary to his theological identity. Roberts understood that as "God's Man of Faith in Power," if he were to die, his legacy and the healing ministry would die with him. In order to preserve his legacy and ensure that the healing ministry would be passed on to the next generation, he knew he needed to pass on the source of his power that made him a worldwide icon of healing evangelism. By guiding a new generation to discover the importance of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the value of speaking in tongues, Roberts was able to multiply his influence so God's promise that "their work will exceed yours" would come to pass and healing would continue to be ministered "to the uttermost bounds of the earth." Roberts' legacy is a complicated one, filled with incredible accomplishments, die-hard convictions, imaginative brilliance, as well as moments of chaos and controversy. But there is one undisputable legacy of Oral Roberts that is attested to by generations of crusade attendees, television viewers, and students and faculty who have walked the iconic grounds of Oral Roberts University over the past decades. Oral Roberts was a man of the Spirit.

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Notes

- 1 Vinson Synan, "Oral Roberts: Son of Pentecostalism, Father of the Charismatic Movement," *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 2:1–2 (2017), 5.
- 2 For a full biography of studies of Oral Roberts, see "Oral Roberts: A Short Bibliography" in this volume.
- 3 Synan, "Oral Roberts: Son of Pentecostalism, Father of the Charismatic Movement," 8.
- 4 D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 27–30.
- 5 G. H. Montgomery, "Oral Roberts in Action," *Healing Waters*, September 1951, 6.
- 6 Oral Roberts, *Unleashing the Power of Praying in the Spirit* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1993), 59. Roberts' father was a Methodist and his mother was a Baptist. As a family, they rarely attended the Methodist church before their conversion.
- 7 Oral Roberts, *Expect a Miracle: My Life and Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 10–11; Oral Roberts, *Oral Roberts' Life Story as Told by Himself* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts, 1952), 23.
- 8 "Testimonies," *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 11 July 1935, 14.
- 9 Roberts, *Oral Roberts' Life Story as Told By Himself*, 50. Roberts testified that following Moncey's prayer, his lungs began to tingle, he saw a light above him, and he ran on the stage declaring "I am healed! I am healed! I am healed!" Furthermore, Oral Roberts, "Faith for Healing," *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 2 October 1947, 6, recounts that it was the anointing with oil that served as a "point of contact" that released his healing.
- 10 *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 8 August 1935, 15. David Harrell, Jr., *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985), 37, incorrectly places his Spirit baptism in August 1936.
- 11 Oral Roberts, "Why You Must Receive the Holy Ghost," *Healing Waters*, May 1950, 15; Oral Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit and the Value of Speaking in Tongues Today* (Tulsa: Oral Roberts, 1964), 10.
- 12 Oral Roberts, "The Miracle Power of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in Your Life," *Abundant Life*, January 1962, 7–8.

13 Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 10.

14 Roberts, "Why You Must Receive the Holy Ghost," 7. Roberts held this view until later in his ministry.

15 Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 36.

16 *The East Oklahoma Conference News*, 5 October 1939, 1. Cf. Daniel D. Isgrigg and Vinson Synan, "An Early Account of Oral Roberts' Healing Testimony," also included in this volume.

17 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 53.

18 Oral Roberts, "Great Revival at Fuquay Springs," *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 22 October 1942, 15. Roberts recognized that by taking a pastorate, he was risking his ability to take calls for revivals and evangelism, but the work there was urgent and he was already seeing success.

19 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 54; "Change of Address and Radio Program," *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 22 October 1942, 15. Taking the Shawnee church was a sacrifice at first, but by the time Roberts had been there a year he had already seen several wage increases and even noted in the *EOCN* that his salary was the highest in the area at \$40 per week. *East Oklahoma Conference News*, October 1943, 4.

20 Synan, "Oral Roberts: Son of Pentecostalism, Father of the Charismatic Movement," 8.

21 Oral Roberts, "Temptation of the Pastor," *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 4 November 1943, 5, 10; Oral Roberts, "By-Passing the Holy Ghost," *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 20 January 1944, 4; Oral Roberts, "Getting the People to Jesus," *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 11 October 1945, 3-4; Oral Roberts, "Our Sleeping Giant," *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 15 November 1945, 3, 14; Oral Roberts, "The Revival We Must Have Now!" *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 27 March, 1947, 4-5.

22 Oral Roberts, "Greatest Need of the East Oklahoma Conference," *East Oklahoma Conference News*, 5 March 1943, 1. Roberts commented, "The greatest need of the hour is for the conference to have a revival to break out in every church that will bring us preachers in closer contact with Jesus Christ and our church members into a deeper spiritual condition."

23 *The East Oklahoma Conference News*, September 1943. Roberts also started a preaching journal for pastors called *The Preacher's Helper* in which he provided sermons on a variety of topics including "Entire Sanctification," "The Baptism in the Holy Ghost," faith, and an intense call to revival called "Three Things The Church Must Do—Now!" *The Preacher's Helper*, May 1943. Roberts' editorial notes, "For several years your editor has seen and felt an urgent need for a magazine that was devoted exclusively to the needs of preachers." It was intended to be a monthly publication. Roberts proposed the idea to the conference early in 1943. See, Oral Roberts, "We Need," *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 28 January 1943, 3.

24 Oral Roberts, "Will God Repeat the Upper Room Revival?" *East Oklahoma Conference News*, November 1943, 1. Roberts was particularly critical of pastors who left the full time ministry to take good paying wartime defense jobs during WWII. He

chides, “Preachers, if you love Jesus like you ought to love Him, you will preach His gospel and you will put HIM first place in your life even if you have to go hungry, sleep on the church benches (yes, tho I am young I have done just that and so have many ministers in this conference), and walk with your shoes almost off your feet, with the blood running between your toes. Our pioneer preachers did it and shouted the victory all along the bloody trail.”

25 Roberts, “Will God Repeat the Upper Room Revival?” 1.

26 B. B. Scrivner, “201 Experiences in Shawnee in Three Years,” *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 23 August 1945, 13.

27 “Editors Mail,” *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 11 October 1945, 2; “Roberts to Radford,” *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 24 January 1946, 15. Apparently Roberts quickly withdrew from the arrangement in Radford following his recruitment to serve as the secretary for the new Southwestern Bible School in Oklahoma. “We Present Our Board,” *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 11 April 1946, 11.

28 “Editors Mail,” *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 3 January 1946, 2.

29 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 64.

30 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 67.

31 Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 10.

32 Oral Roberts, “Why You Must Receive the Holy Ghost,” *Healing Waters*, May 1950, 6.

33 Oral Roberts, “Divine Ammunition in the Book of Acts,” *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 17 July 1947, 4–5.

34 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 81.

35 “Healing Revival in Newnan Church,” *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 17 July 1947, 10–11.

36 “Healing Revival in Newnan Church,” 10.

37 Roberts, “Why You Must Receive the Holy Ghost,” 6, comments, “Everything wrought in my ministry since that day has been done by the Holy Ghost working through me as an instrument. He has been to me as though Christ stood by my side as I preached the gospel or prayed for the sick.”

38 Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 74.

39 Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 75.

40 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 103–12.

41 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 105. This practice not only insulated him from his insecurities; it was necessary to keep him from being seduced into taking credit for God’s miraculous power.

42 Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 47. He unashamedly admitted, “Before I enter the healing line I often pray quietly in tongues until I am edified and released.”

43 Roberts, “In the Clouds with God,” 2. This was the fourth time Roberts claimed God spoke directly to him, each time being marked as pivotal turning points in Roberts’

ministry. He recalls, "Three times before . . . once in 1935, 'I am going to heal you and you are to take my healing power to your generation' . . . once in 1947, 'From this hour you will heal the sick and cast out demons by my power' . . . once in 1949, 'You have been faithful up to this hour. Now you will feel my healing power in your right hand: you will detect the presence of demons, will know their number and name and will have my power to cast them out.'"

44 Roberts, "In the Clouds with God," 2.

45 Roberts, "In the Clouds with God," 12.

46 "Great Holy Ghost Outpouring in Miami Meeting," *Healing Waters*, March 1950, 14.

47 Roberts, "Why You Must Receive the Holy Ghost," 6.

48 Roberts, "In the Clouds with God," 12.

49 "Jacksonville Campaigns Break all Records," *Healing Waters*, May 1950, 5. The report comments, "It was impossible to get an accurate count of those who were filled, but the number must have been in the hundreds."

50 Edward Boyce, "Richmond and Old Dominion Stirred Through Roberts," *Healing Waters*, July 1950, 4.

51 S. N. Greene, "What the Oral Roberts Campaign Meant to Oklahoma City," *Healing Waters*, October 1950, 4.

52 Oral Roberts, "Why You Must Receive the Holy Ghost," 7. Other accounts of numbers include "several hundred souls who received the Pentecostal baptism" in Goldsboro, North Carolina. *Healing Waters*, July 1950, 1–2. The Memphis Crusade reported that "many hundreds earnestly prayed for the baptism in the Holy Ghost." James E. Hamill, "Report of the Memphis Meeting," *Healing Waters*, August 1950, 4–6. A small crusade held in Shawnee, Oklahoma, reported that "over 1,000 came forward at the close of the Saturday night meeting to be sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost." George R. Harris, "609 Saved in Shawnee," *Healing Waters*, December 1950, 16.

53 "Over One Million Attend Roberts Meetings the First Nine Months of 1950," *Healing Waters*, December 1950, 4.

54 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 120–22, contends that Roberts shifted from wanting to be America's Healing Evangelist to "America's leading soul winner." The decline in emphasis coupled with the new emphasis on evangelism also resulted in a name and format change for the OREA magazine. In 1953, the magazine name was changed to *America's Healing Magazine* for three short months, then to *Healing* for another six months. In July, Roberts changed the name once again and the format to *Abundant Life*, reflecting a new era of emphasis on the abundant life concept from 3 John 2. Roberts' seemingly short attention span and propensity to move on rapidly to new ideas was one of the attributes that enabled him to accomplish so many different initiatives throughout his life.

55 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 181–82.

56 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 157.

- 57 Oral Roberts, "Don't Park Here!" *Abundant Life*, January 1959, 3.
- 58 Synan, "Oral Roberts: Son of Pentecostalism, Father of the Charismatic Movement," 10.
- 59 Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 37.
- 60 Roberts noted in 1950, "I rarely speak with tongues because God seems to use my tongue in my own language in a manner that pleases Him. I seek no change because I want His will, not mine. I know that a mighty thrill goes through me when God takes my tongue and uses it for His Glory, either in my own language or as I speak under the Spirit of God as they did on Pentecost morning." Roberts, "Why You Must Receive the Holy Ghost," 7.
- 61 Aaron Freisen "Classical Pentecostal Liturgy," in Mark J. Cartledge and A. J. Swoboda, eds., *Scripting Pentecost: A Study of Pentecostals, Worship and Liturgy* (London: Routledge, 2017), 64–65, points out that although Pentecostals were adamant that speaking in tongues was the evidence of Spirit baptism, they did not expect "that all Spirit-baptized believers could speak in tongues whenever they wanted." The shift to the "at-will" use of tongues did not emerge until the beginnings of the charismatic renewal, which, although overlooked by Freisen, found voice in the teachings of Oral Roberts. Cf. Aaron Friesen, *Norming the Abnormal: The Development and Function of the Doctrine of Speaking in Tongues in Classical Pentecostalism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 133–35.
- 62 Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 19.
- 63 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 465. Freisen "Classical Pentecostal Liturgy," 64, points to the charismatic Catholic, Killian McDonnell, as the originator of this concept in 1968. However, Roberts was teaching this concept since the early 1960s. Although the exact term "prayer language" did not emerge in Roberts' vocabulary until the 1970s, he regularly spoke of tongues in terms of a concrete and "divinely directed language" of the Spirit. See Oral Roberts, "You Shall Be Baptized with the Holy Ghost Not Many Days Hence," *Abundant Life*, January 1964, 2; and Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 22, which comments, "When one prays through his spirit, it is his spirit in cooperation with the Holy Spirit that forms the words of a new language through which the deepest feelings of inner being are expressed to God."
- 64 Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 37.
- 65 Jim Nash, "Taking the Gospel to the People," *Abundant Life*, June 1963, 7. "What has it to do with healing? . . . It has a lot to do with healing. When you speak in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance to your tongue, your soul is in harmony with the Holy Spirit."
- 66 Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 37.
- 67 Roberts, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 29.
- 68 Carl Hamilton, "How God Met People's Needs at the Hutchinson Crusade," *Abundant Life*, February 1962, 3.
- 69 "Speaking Personally . . .," *Abundant Life*, February 1962, 2.
- 70 An example of this is "They Testify at the Crusade . . .," *Abundant Life*, January

1962, 10–11, in which every testimony includes not only a story of healing, but also that they received the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

71 “Team Members Talk About the Crusade,” *Abundant Life*, January 1962, 4.

72 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 159, notes that God told him, “There remains a healing for the sick body of My bride. I have raised you up to be the John the Baptist of your time in my healing ministry, and you are to be a forerunner of a mighty healing for My people before My son returns.”

73 W. C. Armstrong, “Miracle in the Valley,” *Abundant Life*, January 1962, 4.

74 Oral Roberts, “The Miracle Power of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in Your Life,” *Abundant Life*, January 1962, 9.

75 William C. Armstrong, “No Stopping Place,” *Abundant Life*, November 1963, 2.

76 Steve Durasoff, “Jacksonville Crusade,” *Abundant Life*, May 1963, 23.

77 Oral Roberts, “God Has Spoken to Me Again,” *Abundant Life*, June 1960, 6–9.

78 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 162.

79 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 158.

80 Oral Roberts, “A Spiritual Revolution throughout the Earth,” *Abundant Life*, May 1962, 6–10. All caps are original. According to this account, Roberts planned this “university” to be “a free tuition” ministry training Bible school offered very much in the model of early Pentecostal Bible schools. He announced, “We will use the Bible, God’s Holy Word, as our text-book. Those invited to attend will already have their academic education. Our teaching will be centered on how to bring deliverance by the miracle power of God to the people.”

81 *Abundant Life*, April 1963, 1–12.

82 *Abundant Life*, April 1963, 9. In an afternoon talk about the vision for the university, Roberts and Corvin commented, “We intend to offer the BA and BS degrees, then in the 70’s we plan to add some graduate schools. Ultimately, we plan four graduate schools which will offer the master’s degree—political science, business administration, education and a theological seminary.”

83 “Released for Service,” 17. As one attendee described, “A great tidal wave of the Holy Spirit came up over that hill where ORU stands and broke with such a mighty release of power that night that it seemed as though that hill was the highest mountain ever created and God was leaning right on in with His mighty hand.”

84 “Released for Service,” 14.

85 Ervin joined the founding faculty and became a regular speaker on the baptism in the Holy Spirit in Roberts’ Holy Spirit seminars. A few years after joining the faculty, Ervin became a prominent scholarly voice for the charismatic renewal when he published one of the first scholarly defenses of the Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit baptism in his book, *These are Not Drunken as Ye Suppose* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1968). For more on Ervin’s legacy, see Daniel D. Isgrigg, *Pilgrimage into Pentecost: The Pneumatological Legacy of Howard M. Ervin* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2008).

86 “Released for Service,” 17.

87 The first Youth Seminar was attended by 450 students who spent a week on the newly forming campus in 1963. Yvonne Nance, "Youth Set on Fire by the Holy Spirit," *Abundant Life*, September 1963, 2–7.

88 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 173.

89 Roberts, *Unleashing the Power of Praying in the Spirit*, 46, admits that he does not receive an interpretation every time he prays in the Spirit. But, he is convinced that one can learn to grow in receiving the revelation knowledge of the Spirit by praying with interpretation.

90 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 174.

91 Roberts, *Unleashing the Power of Praying in the Spirit*, is devoted entirely to this one topic. This work compiles all of Roberts' teaching on the subject, at times drawing word for word from previous books and articles. While this book contains stories and teachings from Roberts, the overall lack of style and at times unsophisticated tone uncharacteristic of Roberts' other writings suggests to this author that a ghostwriter at Harrison House compiled these teachings in this volume.

92 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 177–80.

93 Roberts, *Unleashing the Power of Praying in the Spirit*, 87.

94 Oral Roberts, "Why Build a Prayer Tower?" *Oral Roberts University Outreach*, Winter 1966, 7–10. Early architectural drawings of the Prayer Tower were designed with more of a space-age crown design. But by 1966, the concept had been morphed to that of a "20th Century cross, one that challenges the youth of a nuclear space age" to place an importance on prayer. The tower was slender to portray the "inner man of the person standing on the inside." The height of the tower was designed to inspire man to "reach toward God." Included with the tower was a series of "prayer gardens." The Prayer Tower was to be the permanent home of the OREA Prayer Group, which was available to answer calls for prayer 24/7.

95 Oral Roberts, "My Eighteen Hours with God in Miami, Florida," *Abundant Life*, May 1963, 7. "One of the buildings upon the University campus will be the Abundant Life Prayer Tower which will rise over 100 feet above the ground, with cloven tongues of fire burning perpetually at its top, symbolizing our complete dependence upon the Holy Spirit. It will house our prayer group as well as provide an 'Upper Room' for prayer and meditation by both students and visitors. We expect many to receive the Holy Spirit in this upper room."

96 Oral Roberts, "Eight Major Goals of the University," *ORU Witness*, July 1964, 3.

97 Roberts, "Eight Major Goals of the University," 3. R. O. Corvin, "Religious and Educational Backgrounds in the Founding of Oral Roberts University," (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1967), 155–56, 168. This policy, while fitting for the founding of the university, became an issue later as maintaining an exclusively Spirit-filled faculty became more of a challenge as the university grew. Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 222, 248.

98 Oral Roberts, "We Are Releasing a New Force," *ORU Witness*, April 1964, 2–3. Roberts admits that at first the board of regents thought this to be an impossible goal.

Yet, many of the finest Spirit-filled academics were moved to come to ORU to be able to thrive in an academic environment that was also Spirit-filled.

99 “A Challenge to Become Turned on Christians,” *Abundant Life*, March 1968, 20.

100 Oral Roberts, “I Expect Miracles across the Earth,” *Abundant Life*, May 1968, 2.

101 “A Challenge to Become Turned on Christians,” 17–19.

102 This claim was predominantly expressed by Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 293, who claims that Roberts “discarded” his Pentecostal view of Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues as evidence in order to moderate his views to be more acceptable to his new Methodist colleagues and those in the charismatic stream. But Harrell misunderstands Roberts’ intentions. Roberts shifted the language of Pentecost to phrases like “release of the Spirit” and “prayer language” not to convey new concepts of the Holy Spirit, but to communicate his Pentecostal belief to a different audience that did not understand the traditional language used in Pentecostal circles. Roberts never backed off his belief in tongues as the sign of Spirit baptism. In fact, it could be argued that he emphasized speaking in tongues more than his Pentecostal contemporaries.

103 Oral Roberts, “My Decision to Enter the Methodist Denomination,” faculty meeting, Oral Roberts University, 15 March 1968, <http://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/oruav/7/>.

104 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 297–99.

105 Oral Roberts, *Holy Spirit in the Now I* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts University, 1974).

106 *Abundant Life*, March 1974, 16.

ORAL ROBERTS' IMPACT ON THE KOREAN HEALING MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Oral Roberts casts a large shadow of influence upon the healing movements and theology of Korea. Oral Roberts University's outreach to Korea through the Doctor of Ministry program impacted the local Korean church with the message of healing. Today, there are over 200 ORU alumni in Korea, many of whom graduated from the Doctor of Ministry program during 1992–2012. This article will reflect on the impact of the ORU Doctor of Ministry program in Korea through the stories of several of the most significant graduates.

Introduction

Since the founding of Oral Roberts University (ORU), the mission articulated to Oral Roberts has been to “raise up your students to hear My voice, to go where My light is dim, where My voice is heard small, and My healing power is not known, even to the uttermost bounds of the earth.” Similarly, the mission of the university has been to “impact the world with God’s healing.” Paul G. Chappell, who served the ORU College of Theology and Ministry for seventeen years as a faculty

member and dean, has called Oral Roberts one of the three greatest Christian leaders in the twentieth century, along with Pope John Paul II and Billy Graham.¹ This is certainly true in Korea, where Oral Roberts casts a large shadow of influence upon the healing movements and theology of Korea. The influence of Oral Roberts' ministry began with his relationship with David Yonggi Cho, the founder of the world's largest church, Yoido Full Gospel Church.² But it was ORU's outreach to Korea through the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) program that truly impacted the local Korean church with the message of healing. Today, there are over 200 ORU alumni in Korea, many of whom graduated from the D.Min. program from 1992–2012. To commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth, this article will reflect on the impact of the D.Min. program in Korea through the stories of several of the most significant graduates.

Healing Movement in Korea

The first wave of the Pentecostal revival began in Korea among Methodist missionaries in August 1903.³ For the next four years, the Holy Spirit began to pour out on Korean believers, and leaders such as Sunju Kil, Ikdoon Kim, Yongdo Lee, and Seongbong Lee were raised up to proclaim the message of healing. Later, Pentecostal denominations arrived in Korea when a Pentecostal missionary named Mary C. Rumsey arrived in Korea in March 1928.⁴ Rumsey began to preach a gospel that included two primary emphases: baptism in the Holy Spirit and divine healing. From her ministry the first Pentecostal church was established in March 1933 in Seoul. Local churches began to invite healing evangelists to hold crusades in various assemblies around the country. Eventually famous healing evangelists began to emerge, such as Sunju Kil in the 1920s, Ikdoon Kim in the 1940s, and Seongbong Lee in the 1950s.⁵ The number of full gospel churches began to multiply, many people accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, and many were healed.⁶ Perhaps the most prominent of these healing evangelists was David Yonggi Cho, who planted the Full Gospel Church on May 18, 1958. Over the next few decades, Cho's church grew to become the largest church in the world.⁷ Younghoon Lee, a senior pastor at Yoido

Full Gospel Church, said that the most important factor for the rapid growth was the healing ministry of Cho.⁸ Cho was influenced by many healing evangelists from America, but it was Oral Roberts who influenced his ministry most significantly.⁹

Even though healing was always important in most full gospel communities, it was not taught at the established theological institutions. Therefore, most of the Pentecostal theologies and practices were disseminated and most of the healing evangelists were trained through the “Prayer Mountain movement.”¹⁰ The Yongmoon Prayer Mountain, founded by Woonmong Ra in 1942, trained the women at Gideon Bible School for two years.¹¹ They would pledge that they would not marry and would spend their whole lives for the Lord in the Prayer Mountains. After graduating, they pioneered the Prayer Mountains by themselves. Around eighty percent of the directors of Prayer Mountains in Korea were from Gideon Bible School at Yongmoon Prayer Mountain by the year 1998.¹² Believers would visit the Prayer Mountains for spiritual refreshing, while others visited for healing from diseases.

ORU Reaches Korea

The Korean language D.Min. program at ORU was launched in 1992 and terminated in 2012. During that period, 138 pastors graduated with the degree of D.Min., even though more than 250 pastors applied. The breakdown of graduates was as follows:

Methodist Church—47 pastors (34%),
Presbyterian Church—33 pastors (24%),
Full Gospel Church—30 pastors (22%),
Evangelical Holiness Church—13 pastors (9%),
Foursquare Gospel Church—8 pastors (6%),
Baptist Church—4 pastors (3%),
Nazarene Church—3 pastors (2%).

Of the program's graduates, five served as denominational presidents, two serve as bishops in the Methodist Church, four serve as the

chairmen of the board of trustees, fourteen serve as faculty members, and ten serve as missionaries. Many others are working as healing evangelists visiting many churches interdenominationally.

The program dates back to the fall of 1986, when the author returned to Korea upon completion of his theological education in the U.S. The initial plan was to open a Korean Foursquare Bible School, but there was little support. Instead, I reached out to Jack W. Hayford, Senior Pastor of the Church on the Way, who was my sponsor for seven years while studying in America. At that time, Hayford was a member of the ORU Board of Trustees and Deputy Dean of the College of Theology and Ministry at the Church on the Way. He advised me to reach out to the seminary leadership at ORU, Paul G. Chappell and Charles Snow, to build a program to develop Spirit-filled leaders in Korea. In 1989, ORU commenced its Master of Divinity (M.Div.) Korean extension program with the help of Korea Foursquare Bible School. As more students joined the M.Div. Korean extension program, ORU also launched the D.Min. program in 1992. Chappell and Snow worked tirelessly to receive permission from the Association of Theological Schools in North America (ATS) for the Korean Language D.Min. Program. The author was named the Director of the Korean Language D.Min. Program and served as an adjunct faculty member for twenty years during 1992–2012. Korean pastors visited ORU for two summers, five weeks at a time, and were allowed to write their projects starting from the third year. Before they visited, they completed their pre-course assignments. After they returned home, they continued with their post-course assignments. In addition, ORU professors visited Korea during the fall semester and taught one class in Korea. The students studied for twelve weeks in total, which is three weeks longer than English-speaking students due to the interpretation of classes from English to Korean.

The impact of ORU's whole person education had a profound impact on the ministries of these graduates. In particular, the graduates' attitude toward the ministry of the Holy Spirit was transformed. Many of the pastors began the program without any significant seminary studies of the Holy Spirit when they studied for their master's degree, except in terms of the basic systematic theological subject of the Trinity.

ORU's teachings from the Pentecostal and charismatic perspectives challenged the pastors because many of them were unfamiliar with many of the terms and practices, including baptism in the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, and prayer for divine healing. In fact, for many of them, the Divine Healing class was the first they had ever been exposed to. Not only were they exposed to new teaching on healing, but they also witnessed these teachings first-hand in the program. One particular example occurred in a 1995 Divine Healing class, when one of the students was coughing regularly due to asthma. The professor, Paul Chappell, who was teaching the Divine Healing class, stopped the teaching and asked all the pastors to stand around the student and lay hands upon and pray for him. The love and compassion that flowed from Chappell during the prayer was evidenced as tears filled his eyes. When the prayer was over, the pastor stopped coughing, and the fever left immediately. The students learned that day that divine healing was not something taught theoretically; ORU professors believed what they taught enough to pray with compassion during the class. Regardless of their denominational background, experiences like this one motivated these pastors to incorporate praying for the sick in public worship services as part of their duties as pastors. To demonstrate further the impact of this program, we will look at several of the ministries of the Korean ORU D.Min. graduates.

Sang Kil Bae

The very first Korean to receive a doctorate degree from ORU was Sang Kil Bae in 1985. Bae was particularly shaped by the classes on healing taught by Oral Roberts and prayed that his ministry would be modeled after him.¹⁴ Bae's doctoral applied research project focused on establishing a model for healing in the local Korean church that he could share with pastors of local churches.¹⁵ After returning to Korea, he began to implement his teaching on the healing ministry and whole person salvation. He designated healing hours in his church, led three-day healing seminars for local church pastors throughout Seoul and rural areas, taught about healing through the radio station called Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), led seminars on the healing to medical doctors, and regularly contributed articles on healing in the medical journal *Zhivago*.

Bae also became a voice of healing in the Korean Methodist Church. In the 1980s, the Korean Methodist Church was in confusion because of pluralism. The President of Korean Methodist Theological University and several other professors had adopted pluralism and contended that there was salvation outside of Christianity. Bae was one of the leading pastors to push back against this movement and defended the healing gospel. Bae urged the young pastors in the Methodist Church to study healing and the power of the Holy Spirit at Oral Roberts University.¹⁶ Because of his influence, one-third of ORU's Korean D.Min. graduates were from the Methodist Church.

Kwang Suk Joo

Kwang Suk Joo graduated in 1996 and is a senior pastor at New Hope Baptist Church. Even before he was enrolled in the doctoral program, he visited many churches to lead healing crusades. He experienced the healing power of the Lord when he had his finger broken during military service. Since 1980, he has visited more than 2,000 churches as an interdenominational healing evangelist.¹⁸ When Joo first visited the campus of ORU and saw the statue of the praying hands at the gate, he felt that if divine power and human science meet together, total healing would be accomplished.¹⁹ He also learned that Oral Roberts included medical science and natural healing in the definition of divine healing. He realized that God called him not only to pray for the sick by preaching, but also to teach divine healing to others by establishing an organization. As a result, he organized the Whole Person Healing New Life Research Institute in 1996. Here he taught on the subject of spiritual, mental, and natural healing, and emphasized physical exercise and environmental healing, among other topics. He invited Christian medical doctors, ecologists, natural therapists, theologians, kinesipathists, cancer specialists, oriental medicine doctors, nutritionists, and the director of Prayer Mountains to serve as lecturers. They taught on the subject of the blood of Jesus, the power of laying on hands, inner healing, preventive health, exercise therapy, counseling, smiling therapy, and diet therapy, among other topics, for a week or ten days.²⁰ Over the past twenty-two years, more than 6,000 people

completed the training, and several branches have been established in China, the Philippines, and Taiwan.²¹

Young Wan Yoo

Young Wan Yoo is a 2005 graduate who serves as a senior pastor at Heaven Central Methodist Church, which has more than 10,000 Sunday morning attendees.²² Also, he is a bishop of Chungchung Conference in the Korean Methodist Church. The church has sent more than thirty missionaries abroad, built mission centers in Chiangmai, Thailand, where Thai national leaders meet regularly for training, and established a Bible College in Chiangmai. This diverse congregation also hosts nine different ethnic services in the church. He assigned one of the church buildings as a shelter for international laborers, where around ninety international laborers were staying. The church has very diverse programs, including education, social works, missionary works, Holy Spirit ministries, lay training programs, and others. Additionally, he holds the Holy Spirit Festival at Chiangmai University, attended by more than 8,000 young men and women every year. Since Thailand is a Buddhist country, his influence on Thailand is unimaginable. Former ORU College of Theology and Ministry dean, Thomson K. Mathew, said that Yoo is living out the vision Oral Roberts had when he established Oral Roberts University. He also said that this church would be the largest one among those that are pastored by ORU graduates around the world. Bishop Yoo said that before he went to ORU, he only knew the name of the Holy Spirit. After receiving the doctoral degree, he studied more in detail about the ministries of the Holy Spirit by reading books. From that moment, many people began to be healed, and many were set free from demonic power. He added that the secret of his church growth is the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Today, Yoo prays for the sick at every service and has become one of the most famous healing evangelists in Korea.²³ He also wrote several books on the Holy Spirit and evangelism, which later were translated into Thai.

Kwang Sig Ji

Kwang Sig Ji, who graduated in 2006, is a senior pastor at Seong Cheon Methodist Church.²⁴ After getting the doctoral degree, he bought

forty-three books on the Holy Spirit and divine healing, which he read repeatedly. By the time he completed reading all of those books, he began to see the gifts of healing appear in his ministry. When he prayed for the sick, the Lord healed the sick from cancer, thyroid disorders, depression, spinal disease, and other diseases.²⁵ He not only prays regularly for the sick at his church, but also visits many churches almost every week to lead healing assemblies. Many people were healed, and their testimonies are posted on his church homepage. This news spread quickly among the D.Min. graduates. He wrote a book called *Power Christian, Power Ministry!*, which was translated into English and Thai.²⁶

Graduates' Influence on Graduate Education in Korea

Both Ji and Yoo are graduates of Mokwon University, which is affiliated with the Korean Methodist Church. Mokwon University was liberal. The students led the democratization movement of Korea. Many of the students were put into prison because they led riots against the government. Yoo was one of those leaders when he was a student. Seventeen ORU D.Min. graduates, including Ji and Yoo, visited Mokwon University as alumni members and met the university leaders. They proposed that the theological trends of Mokwon University should be changed to be more evangelical. Then the theological atmosphere of Mokwon University was changed from liberal to more evangelical and charismatic. Kenneth Mayton, previous director of the doctoral program, was invited to deliver a special lecture on the Holy Spirit and Healing Movement in October 2010.²⁷ In total, twenty-six out of forty-seven D.Min. graduates who belong to the Korean Methodist Church are graduates of Mokwon University. Several of them are teaching at Mokwon University as adjunct faculty, while two serve as members of the board in the Graduate School of Theology. ORU's healing movement changed the theological atmosphere of Mokwon University through the graduates.

As mentioned above, most of the pastors participated in the Divine Healing class formally for the first time in their lives. Even though divine healing is in the denominational doctrines, they were not taught systematically by those who majored in healing in their

seminary life. The Evangelical Holiness Church in Korea²⁸ has four core Christocentric doctrines: Jesus Christ is the Savior, Sanctifier, Divine Healer, and Second Coming King. But the doctrine of healing was not taught systematically.²⁹ Yong Ha Kim, a senior pastor at Yonghyun Evangelical Holiness Church, began to teach the Divine Healing course at Seoul Theological University as an adjunct faculty. Before his teaching, this course was taught by several professors because there was no professor who majored in divine healing. Suk Yong Yoon, the senior pastor at True Light Evangelical Holiness Church, began to work as a dean of the Graduate School of Sungkyul Theological University. He teaches the Divine Healing course for the university. Joon Won Lee and Young Sook Yoon are teaching divine healing at Presbyterian Bible College, even though it is not in their doctrines. Il Sung Lee and Jeong Yeol Ha teach the Holy Spirit and healing ministry of Jesus at Full Gospel Yeongsan Theological Seminary.

Several D.Min. graduates are leading their universities and seminaries as presidents or chairpersons of boards of trustees. The list includes:

- Sung Hae Kim (Cho), President, Hansei University;
- Jun Won Lee, President, Presbyterian Bible College and Seminary;
- Jum Duk Park, President, Soonshin Theological Seminary;
- Late Jung Il Kim, President, Kookje Theological Seminary;
- Woo Yun Kim, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Youngnam Theological University;
- Paul Moon, Chairman, Georgia Central University, Atlanta, Georgia;
- Young Sil Lee, founder and Chairman, Agape Christian School Foundation in Gimalas, Philippines;
- Young Wan Yoo, founder and Chairman, Heaven Central Mission and Heaven Center Bible College, Chiangmai, Thailand.

The above eight alumni members served/serve their theological institutions in Korea and abroad as chief administrators. Their main job is training ministers for the future of their denominations. They have to emphasize their denominational doctrines, church structures, and traditions. However, since they were trained and influenced by whole person salvation and divine healing from their studies at ORU, their philosophy in leading their institutions was widely open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

In Korea, denominational walls are being partially destroyed. Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Seoul, which is affiliated with Tonghap Presbyterian Church, chose the Foursquare systematic theology text, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, which the author translated into Korean.³² The author asked Insoo Kim, professor of Church History at that seminary, why they chose the Pentecostal book as a textbook. He answered that the denominational color is not as important as before. He believed students should know how Pentecostals understand the Holy Spirit even though these beliefs differ from Tonghap denominational doctrines, so that when they go into ministry fields, they can pray for the sick and cast out demons like pastors in Pentecostal churches.³³

Prayer Mountain Healing Crusades

As more and more pastors graduated from the ORU doctoral program, D.Min. alumni met together and discussed how they could contribute to the Korean Church. In 2004 they decided to open a healing crusade at the Prayer Mountain for the public. They chose David Yonggi Cho's Prayer Mountain called "Osan-Ri Rev. Choi Jasil's Memorial Fasting Prayer Mountain" as the best place for the healing crusade. The first healing crusade occurred August 16–20, 2004, four times a day. Twenty-two pastors preached at the first healing crusade. The Prayer Mountain was big enough to accommodate 7,000 people. From the first day, more than 4,000 believers attended. The preaching on healing was accompanied by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The D.Min. alumni served as altar workers to lay hands on those who needed healing, and many people were healed of various diseases. Several believers came to

give testimony to how the Lord healed their diseases. The first healing crusade was a great success. The Prayer Mountain leadership asked the D.Min. alumni to conduct a second healing crusade the next year. This year (2018) the D.Min. alumni are preparing to celebrate the fifteenth healing crusade in July 2018. During the past fourteen years, several leaders from ORU have also participated and delivered healing messages, including President William Wilson, Thomson Mathew, previous dean of ORU College of Theology and Ministry, and Kenneth Mayton, previous director of the doctoral program.

There are three notable cases of healing that stand out from the past fourteen years of healing crusades. The first involved an episode of deliverance from demonic oppression that took place in the middle of a service. A young gentleman stood suddenly attempting to take off his clothes, but his parents and wife tried to prevent his action by pulling him down to sit. He did the same action repeatedly at the beginning of every service. Later we found out that the family took him to the Prayer Mountain for healing because he was a pastor at a local church who was known for exhibiting strange behaviors at home and in the church. On Thursday after the morning service, all the D.Min. alumni met together to pray for him. The pastors laid their hands on him, and the believers prayed in tongues for him. Then a very strange thing occurred. The skin on his face became swollen, then it went to his stomach, to his hands, and to his feet. Once it became swollen, they touched the location and cursed the devil to leave in the name of Jesus. The man was so strong that several pastors held on to him tightly to prevent him from moving. It took more than an hour fighting against the evil spirit. Finally, he fell asleep. Later he was found well dressed and greeted each one of the pastors. He was completely delivered from the evil spirit. He still communicates with our alumni.

A second occurrence involved Hosun Shin, a 14-year-old middle school boy with a disability who was brought in a wheelchair by his mother. A day before he visited the Prayer Mountain, he was diagnosed as terminal by the doctor at Severance Hospital due to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig's Disease). Anyone who has this disease dies before turning 15 years old. He and his mother attended all the services. Following the Wednesday morning

service, his mother came to me and said that her son moved his toe a little bit. She mentioned that her son had suffered from this disease since the second grade. I watched him carefully but could not find any sign of movement. The next day his mother told me that he moved a finger. I watched him again and found that his index finger on his right hand stirred a little bit. The author informed all the preachers and D.Min. alumni to pray for him publicly during the services. After the Thursday morning service, all the pastors stood around him and prayed for his healing. He returned home without much improvement. I visited his home six times that year. Whenever I visited him, I prayed for him fervently by laying hands on him. He gradually improved. Finally, he was completely healed by the blood of Jesus. This young man has graduated from the Busan Presbyterian Bible College and now serves the church as a minister. He has been asked several times to give his testimony in subsequent crusades.

The last story involves a 63-year-old man named Manpoong Her who was infected with polio at the age of three. He was unable to get a polio vaccination because it was during the time of the Korean War and supplies were scarce. Because of polio, the man walked with a limp and a cane for sixty years. He was a believer who served the Anyang Presbyterian Church as a deacon. He attended the healing crusade in 2011. After attending the 6:00 a.m. service, he went to the restaurant for breakfast with his friends. After breakfast, he came out with them but did so without his cane. His friend went back to the restaurant and found it at the place where he had left it. Then he realized that God had healed him. He came to the sanctuary and walked the stairs up and down without a cane. He walked and jumped with joy.

Mission Work to the Uttermost Bounds

One of the educational goals of ORU is to send students to the uttermost bounds of the earth with the gospel of Jesus Christ and his healing power regardless of their majors. Oral Roberts heard from the Lord to “[r]aise up your students to hear My voice, to go where My light is dim, where My voice is heard small, and My healing power is

not known, even to the uttermost bounds of the earth.” The education at ORU is based on this God-given command to the founder. Every summer hundreds of students leave for mission trips, whether it is to a small village in Africa or megacities in China. ORU Korean language D.Min. graduates are reaching the unreached in the uttermost bounds of the earth. Three graduates have founded mission organizations in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand, while ten graduates are serving the Lord as missionaries in other mission fields.

Young Sil Lee, a senior pastor at Jesus’ Hand Evangelical Holiness Church in Woolsan, founded the Agape Education Foundation in the Gimalas Islands, Philippines. He bought 57.8 acres of land and constructed fourteen buildings that house a kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, high school, Bible college, and computer training school for the public. Lee’s goal is not just educating the people with knowledge, but evangelizing all of the islands with the gospel of Jesus Christ. His mission is to implement Oral Roberts’ concept of whole person healing through his educational foundation.³⁴ He is planning to begin clinics in all of the islands. Because of Lee, countless lives have been changed and believers have confidence that they can do many good things with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Bishop Young Wan Yoo began the Heaven Central Mission in Chiangmai, Thailand. He is a founder and chairman of the board and is focusing on evangelizing the northern part of Thailand with the power of the Holy Spirit. He has purchased many acres of land and constructed four buildings that are used for missionary training, a Bible School, dormitories, and seminars. Every summer he holds the Holy Spirit Festival at Chiangmai University, attended by more than 8,000 people every year. During the day, he holds pastoral training on the Holy Spirit for 500–600 local church pastors. During the evenings, he leads the Evangelistic Campaign where many people accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Bishop Yoo and his team pray for the sick individually and hundreds of people are healed every year. Now he is focusing on the holistic salvation of the Thai people. He pioneered more than twenty-six churches for the minor tribes.³⁵

Yoon Woo Lee is a 2006 D.Min. graduate who serves as the general secretary of Vietnam Missions.³⁶ Lee has planted more than

200 churches and established three Bible schools in Vietnam. With his fluency in the Vietnamese language, he helped bring healing to the scars of his war-wounded people. Byung Chon Kim is a 2011 graduate who serves as a missionary to Myanmar and has planted ninety-five churches and a Bible college and seminary in Yangon.³⁷ He trains the students to pray fervently until they are equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit. The graduates preached the gospel with signs following. Many were healed, and churches were planted in various parts in Yangon. He said that the rapid growth of missionary work in Myanmar is the work of the Holy Spirit among the graduates.³⁸ Sun Gyo Jung has served the Chinese people for more than thirty years as a missionary. He is the first one who registered his church with the Chinese government as a foreigner after buying land.³⁹ He evangelizes and trains the Chinese people in Hunan Province. Barnabas Don Lee is working among the Indians in Mexico. He trains the native Indians at three different campuses of Harvest Bible University in Tijuana, Ensenada, and Chiapas, while helping the church in five different locations. Also, he trains the Bible college professors with Pentecostal holistic messages.⁴⁰ Bo Hye Kim is serving the people at Kigali, Rwanda. She is helping the children's ministry and training the ministers at a Bible school in Rwanda. Before she was sent to Rwanda, she completed Sunday school textbooks for kindergarten through high school students at Yoido Full Gospel Church. Joshua Kim and Sun Mi Lee are serving the Japanese people under the Assemblies of God, Japan. Since there are more than 8,000 gods in Japan, they teach the believers to be ready for spiritual warfare against evil spirits by teaching them the works and power of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

These graduates are reaching the unreached in the uttermost bounds of the earth. Despite the opposition of the Buddhist culture in Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand, or poverty in the Philippines, Mexico, China, and Rwanda, they are obeying the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, our Lord, to go to the ends of the earth. Their mission is to preach the gospel of healing for the whole person and hope in Christ. What Oral Roberts heard from the Lord is being fulfilled by the graduates.

Conclusion

The impact of Oral Roberts in the healing movement of the Korean Church is significant. Through the Korean language D.Min. program, God destroyed the walls between the denominations. Since ORU is a non-denominational institution, pastors from various denominations were able to study and learn from their peers who are from different denominations, different theologies, and different church traditions. Through their openness, they became unified in their commitment to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, holistic approaches to ministry, praying for the sick, laying on of hands, and reaching the unreached, because these issues are common in their daily ministries. As the walls of denominational theology are being torn down, new trends are emerging as churches are divided into two new groups: those who believe and follow the Pentecostal teachings of the Holy Spirit and those who do not approve of it. Those who have adopted a Pentecostal view of the Holy Spirit will pray for the sick, pray in tongues, and cast out demons regardless of their denominations. Furthermore, even those who belong to non-Pentecostal denominational backgrounds have fellowship with pastors in Pentecostal churches. That is why Woo Yon Kim, chairman of the board of trustees of Youngnam Theological University, prays for the sick and believes in the baptism with the Holy Spirit, even though his denomination's position is different.

A second impact is seen in the cooperative unity these pastors experienced over the past fourteen years by operating the healing crusades at Prayer Mountain. Jesus prayed, "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20–21). The Korean church was divided into many pieces due to minor differences. However, because of the influence of the ORU D.Min. program and the united effort of the healing crusades, for the past fourteen years these pastors from different backgrounds have come together to pray for the sick. They became one in obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit in love and faith. They discovered that praying for the sick is not about knowledge, skill, or technique, but compassion for the

sick and faith that the Lord is a healer through the power of the Spirit. Compassion is the soil for a miracle. Through them, the Holy Spirit is healing the brokenness of the Korean church. One day, the Korean church will be united under the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Then the Lord will be glorified, and the power of unity will shorten the time before the second coming of Christ.

A third impact is seen in how D.Min. students are living out Oral Roberts' vision to send students to the uttermost bounds of the earth. The Korean church sent more than 30,000 missionaries unto the "uttermost bounds," and ten of the D.Min. graduates are among them. They were equipped with the gospel and healing power of the Holy Spirit. They are equipped with doctoral degrees and are being used greatly in expanding the kingdom of God by defeating the power of darkness. Graduates are also bringing healing through medical science, healing through natural laws, and alternative healing to the definition of divine healing. Because of Roberts' whole person concept, the Korean church is beginning to expand its definition from the traditional view that "healing through the power of the Holy Spirit only is divine healing."⁴² Kwang Suk Joo was instrumental in changing these attitudes about healing through his Whole Person Healing New Life Research Institute in 1996, through which he trained more than 6,000 people. He included the blood of Jesus, gifts of the Holy Spirit, the power of laying on hands, inner healing, preventive health, exercise therapy, counseling, smiling therapy, diet therapy, and other means in his healing seminars.

A final impact of the Korean D.Min. program can be seen in how churches are conducting their discipleship training for leaders. During the last two decades, discipleship training of lay people has greatly improved. They have expanded their knowledge base beyond simply the Bible and are becoming more acquainted with other writings, especially on the Holy Spirit and healing. Il Sung Lee, a senior pastor at Full Gospel Samma Church, recommended for young mothers in his church not to hold secular jobs, but to come to church and pray for their husbands and children while receiving discipleship training from their pastor. More than one hundred young mothers were trained during the last several years.⁴³ On Sunday afternoons, all of the church members were divided into hundreds of small groups and received training from these lay teachers.

In this context, the training methods of healing evangelists in the Korean church have been upgraded. Those who desired to become healing evangelists were recommended to go to the Prayer Mountain to spend long periods of time in prayer. However, they should now also spend time reading books, in addition to praying to the Lord.

Through the Korean Doctor of Ministry program at ORU, Oral Roberts' vision of taking the healing gospel into every person's world is being accomplished. Graduates have planted churches, built buildings, saved souls, and educated the whole person from kindergarten to university age with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Korean church is forever transformed because of this legacy.

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Notes

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2 Oral Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, trans. Hyungchul Jeon (Seoul: Word of Life, 1995), 61–69. At the preface of the Korean version of *Expect a Miracle*, David Yonggi Cho wrote that Roberts' concept on "God is Good" is from 3 John 2. He imitated it from Roberts and named it the three-fold blessing. He always respected Roberts as his spiritual mentor.

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27 Seongcheol Ahn, President of the alumni of the Graduate School at Mokwon University, invited Kenneth Mayton as a speaker at a special lectureship when he visited Asia LIFE University, where the author served as President. Eim interpreted his teaching to more than 200 professors and students.

28 The Evangelical Holiness Church was born in Korea. It is divided into two denominations: Christ Evangelical Holiness Church and Jesus Evangelical Holiness Church. Both of the denominations have their own theological universities: Seoul Theological University and Sungkyul Theological University, respectively. They share the same doctrines.

29 Yong Ha Kim, Senior Pastor at Yonghyun Evangelical Holiness Church in Incheon, interview by author at Ark Prayer Mountain, 21 April 2016.

30 Woo Yon Kim, Senior Pastor at Dongshin Presbyterian Church and Chairman of the Board of Trustees at Youngnam Theological University, interview by author, 18 April 2018. Woo Yon Kim was inaugurated as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Youngnam Theological University in April 2018. Youngnam Theological University was established by Tonghap Presbyterian Church, which follows strong Calvinism. Divine healing has not been emphasized in his denomination. Moreover, the attitude of his denomination towards healing and Pentecostal teachings on the Holy Spirit was more critical. However, he accepted many of the Pentecostal teachings on the Holy Spirit and preached and taught to his congregation the healing of Jesus when he pastored Dongshin Church in Daegu. He is leading his theological seminary towards the whole person salvation concept. Even though he is one of the key leaders in his denomination, he said that the denominational walls are being destroyed gradually.

31 Paul Moon, Senior Pastor at Mount Pocono Presbyterian Church, Mount Pocono, Philadelphia, and Chairman of Georgia Central University, Atlanta, Georgia, interview by author, 10 April 2018. Paul Moon graduated from Chongshin University in Korea, which is affiliated with the largest Hapdong Presbyterian Church. He has pastored for more than forty years in his denominational church. However, his main philosophy in leading Georgia Central University in Atlanta, Georgia, is training the students with the whole person healing concept. Even though he does not name the course “Divine Healing,” he prays for the sick and encourages the faculty members and students to trust the Lord and pray for the people in need.

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- 40 Barnabas Don Lee, *Mexico Mission Prayer Letter*, November 2017, 1–2.
- 41 Joshua Kim, Pastor at Cho's Prayer Mountain, interview by author, 21 July 2016.
- 42 Lee, *Hankook Gyeowhie Wa Shinyoo Woondong*, 25–26.
- 43 Il Sung Lee, Senior Pastor at Full Gospel Samma Church, interview by author, 15 February 2018. The author visited his church several times and saw how the lay leaders trained the church members at Sunday afternoon training sessions.

ORAL ROBERTS: A BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Key Words: *Oral Roberts, bibliography, Pentecostalism, healing, periodical literature, Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University*

Abstract

This article contains the first published bibliography of works by Oral Roberts and published studies of his life and ministry. Included in this bibliography is an account of the holdings of primary and secondary source works available to researchers at the Holy Spirit Research Center at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA.

Introduction

Oral Roberts is one of the most inventive, influential, and controversial individuals of the past century of the Spirit-empowered movement. Yet, studies of his life and theology have been relatively few. The most comprehensive exploration of Oral Roberts' life and ministry is David Harrell's 1985 biography *Oral Roberts: An American Life*.¹ Since that time, few other scholars have explored Roberts' life and theology beyond his healing ministry. It cannot be assumed that Harrell's work has exhausted the limits of the study of this complex and intriguing figure in American religious history. Roberts was more than a healing evangelist; he was an innovator and religious revolutionary who pushed the bounds of faith to accomplish what would seem to be impossible for the son of a Pentecostal evangelist from small-town Oklahoma.

Roberts spent a decade as a pastor, evangelist, and denominational official with the Pentecostal Holiness Church before launching into the healing ministry in 1947. He spent a little over a decade conducting healing crusades. He was a pioneer of radio and print publications. In the early 1960s, Roberts made the transition from evangelist to becoming the founder and president of the nation's first charismatic university, Oral Roberts University (ORU). Once the university was established and moving forward, Roberts built on his success as a pioneer of Christian television through a series of television specials, which featured a number of Hollywood celebrities, including Jonny Cash, Jerry Lewis, Pearl Bailey, Della Reese, and Tennessee Ernie Ford. In the 1980s he launched into the field of Christian medicine by building the City of Faith medical complex and opening the medical school at ORU. In each successive decade, Oral Roberts continued to reinvent himself and his ministry to push the envelope of what was possible for Christian ministry. Although David Harrell gave us a comprehensive look into this man's life in 1985, one volume cannot possibly explore all facets of this complicated and sometimes controversial religious figure.

For those who wish to explore new areas of research into the life and ministry of Oral Roberts, there is no better place than ORU and the Holy Spirit Research Center (HSRC). The HSRC was founded in 1962 when Oral Roberts became aware that Pentecostals, their denominations, churches, and fledgling colleges were doing little to preserve their materials. Roberts began to collect resources pertaining to the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement, which has become one of the largest collections of Holy Spirit related materials in the world. Many of the most important works in Pentecostal and charismatic studies over the past fifty years have benefited from this collection, which consists of over 13,000 books, 1,400 different periodicals, 9,000 audio/video holdings, and 30,000 booklets, pamphlets, and other artifacts.²

Specific to the study of Oral Roberts, the HSRC contains a vast collection of books, periodicals, audio recordings, crusade videos, chapel sermons, Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association publications, and many more items, which continue to be discovered, preserved, collected, and digitized for future research. The HSRC also holds the periodical literature of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, such as *The Pentecostal*

Holiness Advocate and *East Oklahoma Conference of the Pentecostal Holiness Church*, which contains information on Roberts' early life as a pastor, evangelist, editor, and denominational official. Periodicals from the charismatic renewal, such as *The Full Gospel Businessmen's Voice*, contain articles by Roberts. In addition to the ministry, there are many items in the HSRC pertaining to the history of ORU, including hundreds of hours of chapel sermons, partners and Holy Spirit seminars, class lectures, and faculty meetings. The University Archives is another valuable source, containing many items pertaining to the history of ORU, such as photos, audio/video, transcripts of interviews with early faculty, and other important university documents.

The ORU Digital Showcase (<http://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/>) is another excellent resource for researchers, which provides free global access to digitized materials from the HSRC. The Digital Showcase in the Oral Roberts Collection contains many digitized artifacts, such as sermons, unpublished works, and digitized publications from Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, including *Healing Waters* (1947–1953), *America's Healing Magazine* (1953–1955), *Healing* (1956), and *Abundant Life* (1956–1991)³. The OREA periodicals contain a wealth of information in the form of articles, testimonies of healings, and reports of crusades around the world. In addition to these periodicals, there are magazines and newsletters that were published during the establishment and early years of ORU, including *The ORU Outreach*.

Perhaps the most important items pertaining to this subject are Roberts' more than 150 published works, which are provided in the bibliography below. This preliminary list is a part of our continuing effort to build a comprehensive bibliography of Oral Roberts' works. It is our sincere hope that this bibliography will make a significant contribution to the study of Oral Roberts' life and ministry and will inspire new research into the neglected aspects of this American icon.

Published Works of Oral Roberts

Oral Roberts' legacy is marked by his prolific publishing efforts. At the age of 20, Roberts wrote his first book entitled *Salvation by the Blood*, which was published in 1938 by the Pentecostal Publishing House.⁴

Three years later, he published a second book, *The Drama of the End Times*, on the second coming of Christ. Roberts' final book, *The Ultimate Voice*, was published in 2008, when he was 90. During the seventy intervening years, he published over 150 works on various topics, such as salvation, eschatology, pneumatology, healing, evangelism, abundant living, seed-faith, and prayer, as well as published sermons on a host of motivational topics and commentaries on the Old and New Testaments, all of which are held in the ORU library and HSRC. Roberts understood the impact a book could make on a believer's life and faith, but also used his writings as a tool to build a following for his ministry. Roberts' classic work, *If You Need Healing Do These Things*, was offered to his ministry followers and partners from the beginning of his healing ministry in 1947 and by 1955 was in its fourteenth printing and over 400,000 copies had been distributed. For the sake of space, the bibliography has been limited to the books printed in the English language and does not include the countless number of tracts and pamphlets that have been produced through OREA. The list of works by Roberts held at ORU include these:

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Biographies

Oral Roberts was a master of self-marketing and understood how the power of personality could be used to gain a following. Because Roberts' healing ministry was rooted in his own story of his healing from tuberculosis in 1935, he used his story not only as a way to capitalize on his celebrity, but also to give validity to his healing ministry. Roberts wrote about his life very early in his ministry (1952), and all together published four autobiographies as well as a number of reflections on his life and ministry, a feat unparalleled among his peers. Over the years, several other biographies of Roberts' life have been written by family members, including his parents, his wife Evelyn, and his daughter Roberta. There have also been a number of controversial and unauthorized biographies by former colleagues that are not included in this list.

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Academic Studies, Theses, and Dissertations

With the exception of David Harrell's comprehensive biography, the majority of academic studies of Oral Roberts have primarily focused on his place within the healing revival. However, there have been several other studies at various academic levels about Roberts' television ministry, crusade rhetoric, and teachings about faith and prosperity. The very few academic studies documented here are hardly adequate to capture fully the vast impact he has made on so many aspects of American religious life. There are a great number of potential studies that have yet to be explored. Suggestions for future research could include his Native American roots, his pneumatology and views on Spirit-baptism, his "Whole Man" concept that integrated mind-body-spirit, his ecumenical work in the charismatic renewal, his integration of

healing and medicine embodied in the efforts to build the City of Faith, his eschatological writings, his support of the military, the methodology of his publications and literature, and so much more. The field of Oral Roberts studies is wide open for doctoral level research using many of the primary sources outlined in this bibliography.

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Conclusion

The Holy Spirit Research Center is proud to offer this preliminary bibliography of Oral Roberts' works in the hopes of accomplishing several primary goals. The first is to welcome additional information on works by Roberts that are not featured herein. If you have additional information on additional works not included in this list, I would welcome you to contact the director, Daniel Isgrigg, at disgrigg@oru.edu. Second, the HSRC would welcome any donations of important books, artifacts, or personal items from or about Oral Roberts that could be of use to serve future researchers. While ORU has many important items, there are likely important items that may have been lost over time or that have yet to be discovered. Finally, our primary goal in publishing this list of works is to encourage further research about this remarkable figure in American religious history. Through *Spiritus*, ORU is working to publish critical studies on Oral Roberts' life, works, theology, and global impact, some of which have already appeared in this issue. Our hope is that more are to come in the days ahead.

Notes

1 David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985).

2 Notable researchers who have utilized the resources in the HSRC include the following: Walter Hollenweger, Vinson Synan, Killian McDonnell, William Menzies, Donald Dayton, Edith Blumhofer, D. W. Faupel, Howard Kenyon, R. M. Anderson, James Tinney, James Goff, David Harrell, as well as many others.

3 Due to copyright restrictions, the OREA periodicals are unfortunately only available online with an ORU login. However, they are accessible to guest researchers who visit on campus in the HSRC.

4 Oral Roberts' first publication was a short six-page tract called "Character Building," which was a reprint of an article published in the *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*. Oral Roberts, "Character Building," *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 26 August 1937, 5. See Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 43.

5 *America's Healing Magazine*, November 1955, 21.

6 Oral Roberts' five autobiographies are substantial when compared to other prominent evangelists of his time, such as Billy Graham (1), T. L. Osborn (1), A. A. Allen (0), and William Branham (3).

REVIEWS

The Nature Miracles of Jesus: Problems, Perspectives, and Prospects. Edited by Graham H. Twelftree. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017. xix + 285 pp.

In the preface of this collection of essays, editor Graham Twelftree opens with a sentence that shapes the direction of this volume: “The nature miracles of Jesus are a problem, philosophically, historically, and theologically” (xi). The focus of the volume is a collection of seven miracle stories—Jesus turning water into wine, stilling a storm, feeding large crowds with minimal food, walking on water, cursing a fig tree, directing a large catch of fish, and finding a coin in a fish’s mouth. The major problem with these stories is that they are incredible to the ears of modern audiences and call into question the reliability of the storytellers. This, in turn, has significant implications for historical Jesus research, and by extension, the church’s understanding of Jesus. With this volume Twelftree seeks to begin a conversation that may help bring some consensus to our understanding of these stories.

Twelftree structures the volume around the alliterative subtitle of the book. The opening section, “Problems,” consists of one chapter in which Twelftree highlights certain issues in the study of these stories. He begins with a brief treatment of the label “nature miracles,” surveying the biblical language used to describe these events and musing on whether the label is useful for describing them before settling on its usage in the volume. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to a historical overview of the study of these stories, paying particular attention to the question of the perceived historicity of these miracles. He observes that up to the time of the scientific study of the Gospels (Twelftree begins his discussion of this era with Reimarus), the historical veracity of these events in Jesus’ life was simply assumed. With the “scientific era,” as Twelftree calls it, the historical reliability of the nature miracles was largely rejected, leading to the current state of the question in which scholars exhibit a wide array of positions from acceptance of the

historicity of these stories to extreme skepticism. The major section of the book, “Perspectives,” consists of a representation of current positions of the historical reliability of the nature miracle stories and their impact on historical Jesus research.

The “Perspectives” section opens (ch. 2) with an essay by Craig Keener who argues for the historicity of the nature miracles, appealing to other reliable information in the Gospels in which Jesus is portrayed as a wonder worker as support for considering the reliability of the nature miracle stories. Moreover, employing the criterion of analogy, Keener points to his larger work on miracles (*Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011]) to demonstrate that the Gospel accounts have analogies in the present. In his estimation, only a predisposition against the possibility of miracles militates against accepting the historicity of the nature miracle stories. In chapter 3, Eric Eve follows with the perspective that the nature miracles may have originated in historical events in Jesus’ life (though some stories may simply be myth), but over time these kernels were developed into their canonical forms through a process that involved shaping via Old Testament themes and the values of early Christian communities. In chapter 4, James Crossley argues that historical investigation of miracle accounts lies beyond the scope of the historical-critical enterprise, in large measure due to a growing sentiment that the criteria of historicity are ill-suited to assessing whether supernatural acts may have actually occurred. Crossley’s tack is to view the nature miracles as pure myth whose only real historical value is to confirm that early Christians believed miracles were possible.

In the fifth chapter, Ruben Zimmermann offers a literary-hermeneutical approach to the nature miracles that distinguishes between the discourse and the story levels of a narrative. Whereas the nature miracles are depicted as factual events at the discourse level, the accounts describe something quite beyond the experience of the readers, depicting at the story level something more akin to a fictive genre. Zimmermann argues that the tension between the discourse and story levels was felt by the ancient audiences and should be maintained today for its value in communal storytelling.

Chapters 6 and 7 are philosophical in nature, taking as their points of departure Hume's rejection of miracles as violations of the laws of nature. Michael Levine (ch. 6) argues that the possibility of miracles lies less in consideration of natural laws than in the nature of causation. After examining both regularity and necessitarian accounts of causation, Levine provides a detailed analysis of the "logical entailment" theory of causation to show, on the one hand, that it is not sufficiently "loose" to allow for the possibility of miracles, but on the other hand, adherence to it entangles one with several implausible ontological commitments. In chapter 7, Timothy McGrew shows that the collapse of Hume's project has provided for a reconsideration of the possibility of miracles, exemplified in the work of such philosophers of science as Richard Swinburne who argue that given the high probability of some bare form of theism there is no upper limit on the plausibility of such doctrines as miracles, especially in light of modern accounts of miracles.

In the final chapter of the section (ch. 8), Scot McKnight makes a radical departure from the tenor of the preceding chapters in arguing that not only is historical investigation severely limited in what it can accomplish in terms of establishing the historical occurrence of the nature miracles, but it is destructive to the church's life and faith in that it subordinates creedal and canonical portrayals of Jesus to those constructed via historical criticism, which are intrinsically skeptical. McKnight argues for a "radical separationism" between the church's plain reading of the Gospels and historical enquiry to nurture the church's faith.

The volume's final section, "Prospects," includes chapters in which the volume's contributors engage each other's essays (ch. 9) and in which Twelftree summarizes what has gone before and argues for a direction forward that entails an interdisciplinary approach that values both the church's commitments and the need for historical investigation into the nature miracles (ch. 10).

Assessing the value of a collection such as this requires an engagement with each essay. Space restrictions preclude that here, but thankfully, Twelftree has accomplished something akin to this by allowing the contributors to engage each other. So a more general assessment is offered here. The value of the volume is distilled

succinctly in the second sentence of the preface to the book. After noting that the nature miracles pose certain problems for interpreters, Twelftree states: “Yet, surprisingly, this is the first book dedicated to these miracle stories” (xi). In this light, the volume performs a needed service by bringing this scholarly lacuna to the fore. Three features are noteworthy. First, Twelftree’s survey of the reception of these stories is a succinct primer that illustrates not only the historical perspectives of the historicity of these accounts, but also just why little attention has been paid to these specific stories. Up to the scientific era, their historicity was assumed; from that point forward, their implausibility was assumed. This survey is a sort of microcosm of the enterprise of historical Jesus research. Second, Twelftree is to be commended for assembling such a broad representation of perspectives on the topic. In a manageable volume, readers will be exposed to the broad variety of perspectives current in scholarship today. Third, the chapter in which contributors engage each other helps readers to identify points of contention between the positions that may not be apparent as the essays are read in sequence. This chapter also illustrates how irenic scholarly engagement may proceed even in light of substantial disagreement.

Perhaps *The Nature Miracles of Jesus* will ignite the kind of interest in these stories that Twelftree desires to occur. If this is indeed the first volume dedicated specifically to these stories, it is a good introduction to the kinds of considerations that may characterize future discussion.

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**The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ:
Deification of Jesus in Early Christian Discourse.** By
David K. Bernard. Blandford Forum, Dorset, England:
Deo, 2016. ix + 280 pp.

The biography of Fuller Seminary professor, George Eldon Ladd, is cleverly titled *A Place at the Table*. In the mid-twentieth century, Ladd

sought to rehabilitate the flagging image of evangelical thought in hopes of joining mainstream Protestant academia.

A similar desire seems to lie behind David K. Bernard's *The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ*. Bernard is the general superintendent of the United Pentecostal Church International and the most prolific author of the Oneness (Apostolic) Pentecostal movement. Unlike previous apologetic works centering completely on Oneness Pentecostal distinctives — the absolute unity of God fully incarnate in Jesus Christ and the Acts 2:38 “plan of salvation” — this work engages the larger academic world on its own terms and uses the tested methodology of socio-rhetorical criticism to investigate primitive Christology and offer contributions to this study from the Oneness perspective.

Bernard's study, a revision of his University of South Africa doctoral thesis, centers on the exegesis of 2 Corinthians 3:16–4:6, extending the arguments of the “early high Christology club” (EHCC) — scholars like Martin Hengel, Larry Hurtado, Richard Bauckham, and James D. G. Dunn — who hold that the earliest Christians embraced the full divinity of Jesus from the earliest post-Easter period.

Bernard begins with a lively walk-through of the views of the EHCC, interacting with their evidence, analyzing their arguments, and selectively choosing among their conclusions. Bernard seems most impressed with Hurtado's isolation of the “language of divinity” applied to Jesus in the devotional (prayer and worship) life of the earliest church. He also seems troubled, but intrigued by the questions James Dunn raises about the development of ideas of incarnation and the parting of the ways of the Jews and Christians. (This is exactly the same way I read these writings.)

Next, Bernard takes an extensive look at monotheism in Second Temple Judaism and Hellenistic culture, seeking to identify the social location of Pauline Christianity. He builds his exegetical framework on the “language of deification,” ascribing deity to Jesus in the New Testament writings — first in the broad terms of Second Temple Judaism, then in much greater detail in an exhaustive journey through each passage in the Corinthian correspondence that affirms or alludes to the deity of Jesus.

Then, Bernard moves on to a detailed exegesis of 2 Corinthians 3:16–4:6. To his credit, he offers a balanced “big picture” exegesis, grasping the entire meaning of the passage and emphasizing social location and rhetorical devices, while not succumbing to the temptation of saturating every word of the passage with impossibly deep meaning. Bernard concludes this work by “exploring the textures” – social and ideological — that his study has uncovered about Paul’s distinctive Christology and soteriology against the backdrop of Jewish monotheism.

Bernard’s work is lively and well-written, a major accomplishment given the confines of the dissertation format. He engages wide ranging scholarship — including opposing viewpoints, specifically the “history of religions” school of Bousset. He advances his unique doctrinal insights regarding the divinity and humanity of Christ as the key to interpreting biblical language within a growing consensus of early high Christology and bases his findings on the respected socio-rhetorical methodology of Vernon K. Robbins and others. In short, Bernard has earned a place at the table of evangelical theology despite his minority views.

I do have two criticisms and one question.

First, Bernard oversells Oneness Pentecostal theology as a “marginal voice” in the Western-dominated theological discussion and appeals to a postmodern hermeneutic that looks to non-Western expressions of Christianity for a minority corrective voice. But classical Pentecostal theology (including its Oneness offshoot) is thoroughly Western. While Pentecostal music and worship may draw from African and African-American roots, its theology derives from the Wesleyan and Reformed traditions united with revivalism, millennialism, restorationism, and holiness experiences beyond conversion. Oneness Pentecostalism deserves a hearing among evangelical theologians, but not because of its non-Western roots.

Second, Bernard’s “north star” is David Reed’s now sacrosanct observation that Oneness Pentecostalism is an “expression of Jewish Christian theology” — a statement based on Jean Daniélou’s thoroughly dated research written before the full impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi texts on study of Second Temple Judaism. Moreover, Daniélou’s study predates Ed Sanders’ “rediscovery” of Second Temple

Judaism as a “religion of grace” over the long-held caricature of Judaism as a “religion of works.” Sanders ushered in the “new perspective on Paul” and the ongoing “Paul within Judaism” scholarship. I am not saying that Reed’s insight is wrong, but it needs to be updated in light of the advances in scholarship — perhaps a task for David Bernard in the near future.

Finally, I have a question — an honest and sincere question — regarding Oneness Pentecostal Christology. Bernard consistently appeals to what I have labeled elsewhere (in the absence of a better term) the “Father-Son” Christology, a view that explains the biblical distinction between God and Jesus (the Father and the Son) in terms of the dual nature of Christ. God (the Father) refers to the transcendence of God; Jesus (Christ or Son) refers to the humanity of Jesus, the immanence of God incarnate in human form. (In sticky exegetical situations, Oneness Pentecostals sometimes equivocate as to whether the term “Son” or Jesus refers to the incarnate God or just the human side of the incarnation.)

Bernard sees this Christology as Hebraic —reflecting the Old Testament monotheism — while seeing other views (especially Nicene-Constantinople Trinitarianism) as radical restatements of early Christian thought in Greek philosophical categories at the expense of a truly Jewish monotheism. And herein lies my question.

Does not the Father-Son Christology lean heavily on the language of the Chalcedonian Creed? Two natures, one person. Unconfused, but inseparable with the properties of each nature being preserved. It seems special pleading to take opposing ideas as “the acute Hellenization of Christianity” when one can just as easily see this specific version of Oneness theology rising from similar categories. Rooting theology in a selective reading of the Chalcedonian Creed does not seem any less Hellenistic than the philosophical speculation of the Cappadocian fathers and Nicene-Constantinople Creed.

Having said all this, David Bernard’s *The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ* stands as a welcome first foray into evangelical scholarship by a Oneness Pentecostal thinker. Bernard has served his doctrinal position and denominational constituents well. Welcome to a place at the table.

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The Truth About Grace: Spirit-Empowered Perspectives.

Edited by Vinson Synan. Foreword by William M.

Wilson. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2018. xv + 272 pp.

Throughout church history, no issue has proven more contentious than the relationship between grace and law, between what God gives and what God demands. In recent years, the question has emerged again in various facets of what critics have called the “hyper-grace” movement. Although not monolithic, the movement is characterized by a pronounced emphasis on grace and correspondingly, it is thought, a neglect bordering on denial of the proper place of law or holiness in the Christian life.

Empowered21, a global relational network serving the more than six hundred million Spirit-empowered believers around the world, commissioned scholars to present papers on grace from historical and theological perspectives. Their contributions have been edited by Vinson Synan, the leading historian of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements. This useful volume evinces some of the breadth of Spirit-empowered Christianity. Its seventeen articles represent Wesleyan, Reformed, Anglican, Lutheran, Pentecostal, and Charismatic perspectives, written by persons from Latin America, Italy, the United Kingdom, Ireland, India, Singapore, Jamaica, and the United States.

David Moore finds pastoral and theological insight regarding these matters in a sermon by Jack Hayford, delivered after the suicide of a worship leader. Hayford places a firm emphasis on grace in asserting that humans do not possess the power to initiate their salvation or to perpetuate it by their works. It is all grounded in the grace of God extended in the Cross of Christ. Yet a delicate balance must be maintained between the utter sufficiency of Christ’s atoning work and the responsibility of the individual to remain in a state of grace. A single act of sin—even suicide—or an ongoing struggle with a particular sin will not deprive one of salvation. Nevertheless, if a believer chooses a pathway of ongoing sinning in a spirit of indifference, salvation can be lost.

Michael Brown evaluates the claim that all sins—past, present and future—are already forgiven in Christ. Such a doctrine, he concludes, can lead to reckless, ungodly living. His position is that when the sinner turns in faith and repentance to Christ, only those sins committed up to that point are forgiven. All future sins need to be confessed and sincerely repented of for there to be forgiveness. Yet Brown is not denying eternal security. A believer who sins does not become unsaved, but needs to “apply the blood of Jesus” to be cleansed once more. This is the “forgiveness of relationship,” not the “forgiveness of salvation.”

In a cogently argued biblical and theological analysis of the hyper-grace movement, Trevor Grizzle finds an unbalanced reaction to legalistic religion. Its proponents trace legalism to Luther and Calvin, who promulgated rigid rules of conduct for the Christian life. This reviewer might respond that the fundamental tenor of their respective theologies was anything but legalistic. Luther’s *simul iustus et peccator* embodied a robust affirmation that the Christian who struggles with sin is nonetheless justified in Christ. Calvin insisted that divine forgiveness precedes repentance and thus the Christian life, although beset at times by sin, is an eternally secure life in Christ.

Grizzle notes the claim of some hyper-grace teachers that the Old Testament was a religion of law, given to convict individuals of sin. But Jesus came to redeem sinners from the law, to free them to live under grace. Therefore, the law is unnecessary for the Christian life. Grizzle argues persuasively that law and grace are not, in fact, antinomies, that Jesus died to fulfill rather than abolish the law. Law is, he says, “the gift of grace” and thus a positive guide for the Christian life.

In the teaching of John Wesley, Henry Knight III finds a balanced presentation of the Christian life. While Wesley concurs with Calvin’s and Luther’s affirmation of justification by grace through faith, he further insists that God’s grace, enacted through the Holy Spirit, is fundamentally transformative, restoring the individual to the original “divine nature,” or image, which Adam possessed. This process of sanctification requires the cooperation of human free will with grace.

Joseph Prince, senior pastor of New Creation Church in Singapore, considered by many as a major voice of the hyper-grace movement, articulates his own position in the final contribution to this volume. Distinguishing between an old covenant of law and a new covenant of grace, Prince contends that, under the former, “God demands righteousness from sinfully bankrupt man,” but under the latter, “God provides righteousness as a gift.” Therefore, the Christian lives, not under law, but under grace.

Nevertheless, any purported grace that frees one to engage in a licentious lifestyle is a “counterfeit grace.” A person who is truly living under grace is living a holy life. “Under grace, when we experience the love of our Lord Jesus, we will end up fulfilling the law!” Prince insists. “Under true grace, we will end up being holy. Grace produces true holiness! . . . When the love of Jesus is in us, we can’t help but fulfill the law We lose the desire to commit adultery, to murder, to bear false witness, or to covet.”

Prince’s position on this matter accords with Calvin, who claimed that, while the sinner is put right with God *sola gratia*, through no work of his own, but solely by the unconditional grace of God, that sinner, once touched by the grace of God, will live a transformed life. In fact, a holy life is a “sign of election.” In Wesley’s day, some preachers severely distorted Calvin’s teaching and claimed that grace meant that it did not matter how they lived. In response, Wesley engaged in a robust insistence that sanctification is, in fact, a necessary qualification for heaven.

A volume such as this, addressing an issue of pressing significance for the church today, comprising such a diverse collection of scholars, all of them Spirit-empowered, is most welcome. It seems to this reviewer that such breadth embodies beautifully the wide-ranging, ecumenical, Spirit-empowered interchange that Oral Roberts envisioned for the university he founded.

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***Women in Pentecostal and Charismatic Ministry:
Informing a Dialogue on Gender, Church, and Ministry.***

Edited by Margaret English de Alminana and Lois E. Olena. *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies*, 21. Leiden: Brill, 2017. xxii + 410 pp.

Editors Margaret English de Alminana and Lois E. Olena have gathered an outstanding selection of authors from various backgrounds to tackle multiple areas of a timely, but, until recently, often neglected topic. Alminana, Associate Professor at Southeastern University, and Olena, Associate Professor of Theology and Jewish Studies at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, certainly have first-hand experience of the cultures and situations their text addresses, as do the other authors. Their goal is to unpack the on-going struggle for female agency and voice in the church and to address the theological and cultural challenges women face within the androcentric Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement. By doing so, they hope to encourage a new way of thinking about the contributions and struggles of women in the movement. Each author reflects on the question, “How have women responded to a religious context that has depended upon their gifts yet, at the same time, has limited their voices and perspectives?” Their self-reflective approach offers critique of the movement and individuals where applicable, correction where necessary, and affirmation and praise where due.

The book is divided into four sections. The first deals with the biblical and historical roots of women’s role in leadership as seen through a Pentecostal lens. Melissa Archer, by examining New Testament texts with a Pentecostal hermeneutic, demonstrates support for women in all levels of ecclesial leadership, while Mimi Haddad contends that the Old Testament texts support an egalitarian way of thinking. Zachary Tackett surveys the role of women preachers within American Pentecostalism and finds that egalitarianism, based on an eschatological theology of the Spirit, although promised in the early years of the movement, was not truly carried out in praxis and was lost as the movement institutionalized.

Section two examines ministries of women who left a legacy within the movement. By investigating the experiences of Florence Crawford, Alminana demonstrates how the egalitarian ethos of early Pentecostalism was quickly abandoned when men were available and willing to continue the work begun by women, and that Crawford's true legacy has never been properly acknowledged. Jennifer Miskov presents Carrie Judd Montgomery as a woman who chose to work within patriarchal structures, and Amy Artman describes Kathryn Kuhlman as a powerful woman who created an extensive Christian media sphere yet failed to overtly challenge patriarchal structures or encourage other women to do so. Finally, Kate Bowler explores the complex world of the wives of prosperity preachers. Although at times living in the shadow of their famous husbands, these women were often the backbone of their ministries, and many came to establish their own authoritative positions after their husbands' passing.

Section three focuses on the work of women within the global Pentecostal movement. Denise Austin and Jacqueline Grey outline the significant roles women have played in the development of Australian Pentecostalism as influential, resilient, courageous, and creative leaders, teachers, and missionaries, while Linda Ambrose details the public life of Bernice Gerard, who not only challenged the boundaries placed on women but also advanced ecumenism within Pentecostal circles. Olena highlights the concept of the "Say Hello," ministry begun by Lynda Hausfeld, which uses hospitality as a means of engaging Muslim women throughout the world. Lastly, Beth Grant leads her readers in a discussion of the commodification and devaluation of women through pornography and sex trafficking, and offers a theology that establishes the value of female children and women based on their creation in the divine image.

Finally, section four addresses concerns unique to women in leadership positions within the movement. Loralie Crabtree and Joy Qualls present church planting as a viable, and in some ways, preferential option for women desiring leadership positions. Estrelda Alexander uses liberation theology to explore how the church might respond appropriately to the struggles of women and other marginalized people within present Pentecostal-Charismatic ecclesial structures.

Next, Stephanie Nance and Ava Oleson flesh out a possible theology of co-gender ministry. Peter Althouse then closes with an analysis of the Christian healing ministry in terms of feminist and gender studies.

An outstanding feature of this collection is the editor's notes that precede each essay. Although Alminana has provided a thorough introduction to the text in its entirety, each chapter opens with an introduction that offers background information as well as the thesis and methodology of the essay. Rather than leaving the reader feeling as though there is no reason to read further, the introductions are enticing, and the insight astute. Readers are drawn in even before they have begun to read.

With such a variety of topics, it is difficult to imagine that anything has been left uncovered. Yet, the text has left me wondering about the voices of Latino, Asian, and Native American women in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement. However, the editors do qualify in the introduction that the study is intended to be approached through a North American lens, with most of the authors being North American. Missing also are the voices of the women in the pew, who make up a large percentage of the movement, but whose voices are rarely heard. Perhaps there is no more marginalized group than this. However, this is what a good book does; it carries the reader's thoughts beyond the scope of the current text.

This book would benefit anyone wanting to gain a clearer understanding of the state of women in the Pentecostal-Charismatic realm. While ideal for university or seminary students, it should be of interest to clergy and laity as well, so that they might better understand the ongoing plight of women within the church. Pentecostal-Charismatic women will certainly encounter accounts that resonate with their own experiences. Alminana posits that the narrative of women in the Pentecostal-Charismatic story contains significant gaps, and she and Olena set out in this text to fill those gaps. Their efforts are most definitely successful.

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The Split God: Pentecostalism and Critical Theory. By Nimi Wariboko. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2018. ix + 239 pp.

In *The Split God*, Nimi Wariboko treads where few dare by bringing Pentecostal thought into dialogue with critical theorists and continental philosophers, including Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Lacan, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Giorgio Agamben. Wariboko considers how these influential scholars can facilitate innovative reflection on Pentecostalism. Instead of employing academic Pentecostal theology, though, he presents case studies from everyday African Pentecostalism, situating the conversation around grassroots stories and experiences. In his analysis, Wariboko identifies four “splits” within everyday Pentecostal practice: the ontological split in the divine nature, preventing completeness in God; the split that creates incompleteness in existence; the split in the subjectivity of the Pentecostal believer, which is the divide “between the desires and nomos of this world and the spiritual world he or she hopes to inherit,” and the split between the noumenal and the phenomenal in the Pentecostal worldview (xv).

To begin, Wariboko detects that lived-out Pentecostalism embraces a split God, making it “radical and nonorthodox” (xii). This unique feature, however, provides an advantageous position to engage with contemporary philosophy. Žižek, for example, challenges Christianity, arguing that “the ‘death of God’ compels human beings to face reality as an internally inconsistent and incomplete whole” (3). Yet Wariboko postulates that Pentecostalism overcomes this challenge. After all, its theology emerges out of daily social practices that directly reflect the “cracks and splits” inherent within reality as well as the split within God’s ontological nature. The divine is split, not whole, because God is always in relation with humanity through self-limitation. Because constantly relating, God is fluid and, in a sense, emerges from this relationship. Thus, Wariboko contends that Pentecostal theology fundamentally understands reality as inconsistent and incomplete. It is open to manifestations of the “expected unexpected” within the created order.

Wariboko also uses the day of Pentecost to argue that splits are basic to the nature of Pentecostal thought. Here he relates the expression of tongues to Lacan’s triad of imaginary, symbolic, and real. Pentecost brings together people from disparate places and languages, but it also creates divisions. Most notably, Pentecost conveys the split or divide within the Real—in this case God as “ontologically open”—as well as the divine-human divide, resulting from the ineffability of God’s essence. Wariboko argues that Pentecostals live with the gaps of the noumenal and

phenomenal realms, realizing that they cannot be entirely closed, while also attempting to pull back the veil of ignorance that separates the two.

Additionally, Wariboko acknowledges the influence of capitalism upon Pentecostal thought and practice. He claims, “The antifragility of late capitalism (finance capital) comes at the expense of the fragility of ethical citizens” (119). Pentecostals are not immune from these effects. They have been wooed and ensnared by capitalism, as evidenced in the rise of the prosperity gospel in the Global South and the struggles of immigrants in the West. To demonstrate, Wariboko studies African Pentecostal immigrants in New York City who view economics as both a physical and spiritual battle; accordingly, he argues that Pentecostal spirituality and worship may offer a way to resist capitalistic logic.

For Wariboko, worship as pure means is not directed toward an end; it is a “pure modality without end” (134). When worship attempts to serve a purpose, it becomes bastardized as a commodity. However, worship that is communion with the Holy Spirit lacks predetermined goals. It is an act of play whereby we are freed from the grasp of capitalism. We cannot attain to such worship intentionally and directly; instead, it must develop out of the failures of ordinary worship.

Finally, Wariboko argues that academic Pentecostal theology falls short in addressing the grassroots dimensions of its movement. In part, this deficiency stems from the focus of Pentecostal theology upon global and macro issues. Consequently, Wariboko proposes that theology must also be done from below, as it is lived out—what he calls microtheology. Wariboko examines prayer in Western Africa as well as practices adopted from African traditional religions to demonstrate how microtheology can “foster moral solidarity and trust” (193) across social contexts. For him, a robust theology must engage texts of various forms, including the “texts” of daily Pentecostal existence.

Admittedly, while reading *The Split God*, I sometimes failed to follow the connections of Wariboko’s arguments. Throughout the text he provided limited context for the arguments he employed from the various philosophers. I wonder whether additional context would have fleshed-out these arguments more effectively. However, I found Wariboko’s chapters on capitalism and worship as pure means to be quite provocative. I agree that authentic worship functions to free us from the grip of capitalism, but in my opinion, it must also be accompanied by political and social action. I predict Wariboko would agree, but his book predominantly omits these approaches. I would appreciate reading his reflections on social justice activism, especially what grassroots Pentecostalism can offer.

Concerning worship as pure means, I agree that it is the ideal form of worship, but question whether it is truly obtainable or merely theoretical. Is it more accurate to suggest that such a pure form of worship is the-out-there-encounter that we touch at moments, but always only fleetingly? Moreover, Wariboko argues that this kind of worship resists seeking ends, but at the same time, maintains that it is an encounter with the Spirit. Yet is this not an end in itself? Given human nature, can we completely free ourselves from relationships of exchange? Furthermore, are we able to remove ourselves from the personal and social attributes that hinder such worship? I contend that these characteristics, even when depraved, are what constitute us as persons and, thus, indispensable.

The Split God is certain to arouse discussion within Pentecostal circles and, on several points, will likely split scholars along conservative and progressive lines. For example, Wariboko's ontological claims about God possess strong resemblances to process theology and will probably find resistance among traditionally-leaning theologians. These contentious points, though, should not distract scholars from engaging Wariboko's arguments *in toto*. In my opinion, Wariboko's call to embrace microtheology is merited, especially given the diversity of the global Pentecostal movement and its embodied practices. Solely painting Pentecostalism with broad brush strokes will not suffice for effective theological reflection in the twenty-first century. Both macro and micro theological approaches are needed.

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A Diagram of Fire: Miracles and Variation in an American Charismatic Movement. By Jon Bialecki. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017. 263 pp.

In *A Diagram of Fire*, Jon Bialecki conducts an ethnographic study of the Vineyard, a leading North American charismatic group founded by John Wimber. As an anthropologist, Bialecki is interested in using secular anthropology to explore the Vineyard churches and compare them to other traditional Pentecostal and evangelical Christianities. His central thesis argues that the modalities of Vineyard's spirituality provide the necessary mechanism by which normative elements and variation combine to define the movement. Bialecki employs Gilles

Deleuze's concept of a "diagram" to illustrate the ways that variations within the Vineyard modalities serve simultaneously to constrain and allow novelty within the ethos of the movement.

Bailecki does an excellent job of reading the culture of Vineyard through the lens of a secular ethnographer without particularly engaging the validity of its distinctive religious claims. Instead, he adeptly identifies the dynamics of spirituality, practices, church size, and challenges that Vineyard culture has created. Because I am not a trained anthropologist, I found parts of his analysis difficult to follow. Yet his observations about the various beliefs, practices, and nuances of charismatic spirituality make it an enjoyable, albeit challenging, read.

In the Introduction, Bialecki lays out the landscape of the dilemma of anthropological studies of religion. He challenges the traditional idea that Christianity is universally "plastic" in the ways that it normalizes and orders itself. He recognizes that groups that welcome the various modalities of the Holy Spirit, such as the Pentecostal-Charismatic, in general, and Vineyard, in particular, are able to maintain a sense of stability while at the same time allowing for novelty. This ability is summed up in the concept of the "miracle." He states, "This book will suggest that the miracle is both the mechanism through which novelty is produced and the sieve used to strain and order novelty" (19). Though often weighted with methodological discussions, his introduction gives the sense of what he is trying to do and just enough of a historical picture of the group he is engaging.

In Chapters One and Two, Bialecki engages the aesthetics of a typical Vineyard worship service. He notes that Vineyard worship is characterized by various egalitarian aspects in which "everybody gets to play," including such features as casual dress, participatory worship, and democratized access to the Holy Spirit and the gifts. Particularly insightful are his observations about the "commodity aesthetics" of worship, in which the "commercially crafted" worship music, shared egalitarian practices, and overall sense of "too muchness" in worship drive people to both tears and joy. He further explores the tensions between organization and novelty expressed in governance structures, stewardship models, and even the marketing practices (including a detailed analysis of the fonts used!). Yet, for him, the purpose of such

commodities is more about encouraging adherence to identity with the organization than any sort of desire for profit (56).

In Chapter Three, Bialecki outlines his theory of Vineyard practices as a “diagram of fire.” What he means is that inherent in Vineyard’s charismatic theology are particular conflicting forces that provide both normative and disruptive potentialities in relation to traditional modes of Christianity. As opposed to traditional forms of Christianity that value order, the emphasis placed on the Holy Spirit allows for welcome disruptions to normative practices by introducing “surprise” elements such as God speaking or miracles taking place. These novel experiences create an environment that not only allows for the potential for change in the lives of believers, but encourages it. In Chapter Four, he demonstrates this through the common Vineyard practice of “hearing God’s voice.” Because divine communication is by nature external in origin, it typifies charismatic diagram. Hearing God’s voice can be both an active pursuit, as in the case of one seeking for answers in prayer, and a passive surprise, as in the surprise occurrences of the gift of prophecy (95–97). In this way, divine communication has the potential to be both according to the person’s will and contrary to it, all of which stimulates change.

In Chapter Five, the author details his experience as an uninitiated participant in Vineyard small groups, the place where much of the pedagogy pertaining to the diagram of the novel and the miracle takes place. It is particularly interesting to read his account of his experience of “receiving prayer” in these groups, noting the “self-conscious” feelings, awareness of the bodily sensations from tactile touch and other physical experiences of God’s presence (115). Through these experiences, he identified three differences in “language ideology” between classical Pentecostal and Vineyard modalities of God speaking: archaic versus contemporary grammar, ventriloquist versus elaborator, repetition and biblical language versus conversational speech events (124–126). This analysis leads him to identify a distinctive Vineyard model of divine speech pattern: invitation to speak, the description of the evidence of the speech, the gloss or unpacking of that image, and the qualification of the speech as subject to testing. In Chapters Six and Seven, he discusses how other practices such as speaking in

tongues, healing, and demonic deliverance also constitute attributes of the diagram of fire that serve to typify Vineyard spirituality. After these perceptive reflections, he concludes with some heavy anthropological reflections about how the Vineyard diagram informs the current understanding of religion.

Jon Bialecki has offered the Pentecostal-Charismatic community a gift in this study. His outsider perspective, offered with genuine curiosity and without judgment, gives those of us on the inside some new language and new trajectories by which to understand and evaluate our own tradition. This at times heady and often personally engaging study will make you think, reflect, and smile. Its value goes far beyond those interested in the Vineyard movement. I recommend it to anyone interested in exploring the modalities of charismatic spirituality particularly from a social science perspective.

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New Ways of Being Pentecostal in Latin America.

Edited by Martin Lindhardt. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016. vii + 249 pp.

Pentecostals and charismatics in Latin America are no longer neophytes in the region. The Spirit-empowered movement, which has demonstrated its staying power with Pentecostalism's over-a-century-long history and the Charismatic Movement's five decades, is more than an opiate to ease suffering or an escape from Latin American reality, although Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity has indeed empowered the poor and proven itself an option for the masses. As the movement has developed over time, however, significant changes in language, culture, theology, and demographics, to mention a few, have occurred. In this monograph, *New Ways of Being Pentecostal in Latin America*, Martin Lindhardt and the other social scientists point to this transformation in Latin American Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement over time.

In this volume Lindhardt highlights the religious pluralism and competition on the Latin American continent that has resulted in the diversification of Pentecostal Christianity. Because Pentecostals and charismatic Catholics have chosen to express their faith differently, divergent practices have emerged. While affirming earlier research as to the causes of the movement's growth and expansion in Latin America, the case studies in Lindhardt's monograph have a different aim and focus. The authors observe the various processes of religious transformation and how these have led Latin Americans to new ways of being Pentecostal. Such an undertaking hinges on a careful analysis of data and interpretation of the emerging shift in Latin American Pentecostalism.

Several of the developments identified in the monograph spring from (1) the tension between the "deinstitutionalization of Pentecostal religious life and the negotiation of individual Pentecostal identities," (2) the "increasing pluralization" of Pentecostal faith communities and "religious competition," (3) the emergence of "new generations of Pentecostals," and (4) an increasing engagement of Pentecostals in politics and civic affairs along with "partial revisions of classical church-world dualism" (viii–xi). Although the dozen contributors are social science experts (sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists) of Latin America, only one is Latin American (Brazilian), two are North American, and the majority are European. More representation from the South would have given the work a more balanced view and voice from and for Latin America.

The book is comprised of eleven chapters along with an introduction by the editor Lindhardt and an afterword by David and Bernice Martin. The first part (chs. 1–5) makes the case for the effects pluralization and the religious economy have had on Latin American Pentecostalism. Andrew Chestnut provides a panoramic view of the region in chapter 1, while Stephen Hunt surveys the competition between Pentecostalism and Catholicism in Brazil. Jakob Egeris Thorsen presents the Pentecostalization of Catholicism in Guatemala, Lindhardt studies the mobility among the various Pentecostal churches in Chile, and Toomas Gross makes the case for religious competition in southern Mexico.

The next four chapters (6–9) highlight the surge of new generations of Latin American Pentecostals. George St. Clair in chapter 6 examines an established and traditional Brazilian Pentecostal group's transmission and reception of Pentecostalism by new generations. Lindhardt follows with a study of the reinterpretation of Chilean Pentecostalism as a youth religion, while Evguenia Fediakova observes how second-, third-, or fourth-generation Pentecostals in Chile have found new methods of practicing their faith. Then Henri Gooren compares and contrasts political engagement by one of the most Pentecostalized countries in South America (Chile) with one of the least Pentecostalized (Paraguay).

The final two chapters (10–11) explore social and political involvement in Guatemala and El Salvador (Virginia Garrard-Burnett) and Brazil (Maria das Dores Campos Machado). As stated in Lindhardt's introduction, "Taken together, the chapters comprehensively illustrate how Pentecostalism has transformed Latin America's religious field (including Catholicism) within recent decades and how it has itself been transformed along the way" (xxvii).

According to Lindhardt, several of the developments in the Spirit-empowered movement in Latin America presented by the authors of *New Ways of Being Pentecostal in Latin America* have been largely overlooked in Pentecostal-Charismatic scholarship (64). One example is the case of shifting church allegiances, which represents a notable change in Chilean Pentecostalism; yet, according to the ethnographical analysis in chapter 4, it is a phenomenon unobserved by scholars of the movement. Chileans and Latin Americans not only join Pentecostal churches but also frequently leave them either to join a different Pentecostal church or to return to secular or Catholic life. Moreover, fluidity in church allegiance and the aggressive rivalry between Pentecostal groups are "understudied phenomena" (67). Scholars apparently know why Latin Americans choose to become Pentecostal, but do not understand why they frequently switch membership from one Pentecostal group to another.

Studies on Pentecostalism in various parts of the world are more readily available today than in the past since the movement's globalization has captured scholars' attention. Though readers may initially be intrigued by the book's ontological title, the academic rigor

of the studies quickly attracts them to the scholarship on social mobility and the development of pluralism. Peter Berger's theory of the market metaphor from the 1960s is positively utilized by some of the scholars in *New Ways of Being Pentecostal in Latin America* to describe the qualities of the Pentecostal Movement that explain its expansion. Yet, these same scholars are cautious in applying the market metaphor too literally as they strive to avoid oversimplification. Beyond stating the obvious—that Latin American Pentecostalism is a growth phenomenon as earlier research has concluded—this book assesses important transformations of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in Latin America in recent years, thereby helping to advance the study of global Pentecostalism and increasing awareness of the changes the movement has undergone in recent decades.

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The Old Testament in Theology and Teaching: Essays in Honor of Kay Fountain. Edited by Teresa Chai and Dave Johnson. Baguio City, Philippines: Asia Pacific Theological Seminary Press, 2018. 192 pp.

*K*ay Fountain is a pastor, leader, and scholar who has focused her ministry in Asia Pacific. The festschrift is written by Fountain's current and former students and colleagues, including a chapter by Tim Bulkely, her Ph.D. mentor. Each essay focuses on either her life and ministry or her passion for connecting the exegesis of Old Testament scriptures with Pentecostal leadership in the Pacific Asian context.

The book begins with three essays about Fountain and her background, the need for pastor-scholars within the Pacific Asian context, and the importance of her archaeological research at Tel Burna. In the first chapter, Adeline C. Ladera describes Fountain as a Spirit-filled person, pastor, innovator, scholar, and leader. From her humble beginnings in New Zealand, Fountain pursued higher education,

planted a church, and became a senior pastor and the academic dean of Asia Pacific Theological Seminary. The second chapter on “Asian Theological Education” by Tham Wan Yee provides a pastoral and theological perspective on the need for more pastor-theologians within the Pacific Asian context, a perspective that reflects Fountain’s passion for helping Asian students become pastor-educators in their own respective contexts. The third chapter by Itzhaq Shai, Chris McKinney, Benjamin Yang, and Deborah Cassuto concerns Fountain’s archaeological research at Tel Burna in the Judean Shephalah.

Chapters four through ten focus on exegetical interpretations of Old Testament texts as applied to leadership in Pentecostal contexts. Tim Bulkeley and Jacqueline Gray present their understandings of the book of Esther in their respective essays, which was also the emphasis of Fountain’s doctoral dissertation. Bulkeley argues that modern adaptations to conform the story of Esther to current conventional gender roles may prompt readers to miss Esther’s struggles, wisdom, and courage within the constraints imposed on her by her historical-cultural context. To address this conundrum, he suggests that an awareness of the constraints in which Esther lived should prompt empathy in the reader of her story. Gray views the book of Esther as a story of how one who was marginalized, socially exiled, and powerless emerged to serve in a position of power where she became a peer of those in authority, a leader within her community, and a person of great influence for the justice of her people. Her story, then, became an example of what the Jewish Diaspora hopes for and how Pentecostals today should go about bringing restoration and transformation within their respective communities.

Dave Johnson approaches the story of Gideon in Judges 6 as Gideon himself may have understood it within his historical-cultural and anthropological context, and then connects the story with the broader Asian context since issues such as animism, monotheism, honor and shame, patron-client relationship, and social status are prominent in both contexts. Although Gideon was a person of low social status, God raised him up to be a valiant warrior. Because of Gideon’s obedience, Yahweh brought about victory through him, restoring, at least for a time, God’s honor among the people.

Wonsuk Ma looks at the emergence and tragic ending of the leadership of Samson and Saul. He suggests that while the Spirit first affected the inner being of Samson in Judges 13:24–25 and Saul in 1 Samuel 10:6–7 and 9 at the beginning of their respective careers, the effect of the Spirit's presence in subsequent experiences was contingent upon their human response to the Spirit because character and ethical formation are a joint work of divinity and humanity. Samson's and Saul's later failures to respond to the Spirit with the resulting lack of character helps to explain their tragic endings.

Lian Sian Mung differentiates between the charismatic and non-charismatic roles of the Spirit in Isaiah 11:1–5. In arguing that the hoped-for descendant of David would be charismatically empowered by the Spirit of God with wisdom and understanding (v. 2) to carry out the non-charismatic tasks of judging the poor with righteousness and deciding with equity for the oppressed of the land (v. 4), and that he would be charismatically endowed with the spirit of counsel and might (v. 2) to do the non-charismatic task of slaying the wicked, Mung proposes the new David as one empowered by the Spirit of Yahweh to serve as his agent to establish a righteous community, with the non-charismatic fear of Yahweh (vv. 2–3) enabling him to demonstrate faithfulness to Yahweh (v. 5).

Tim Meadowcroft argues that the experiences of Daniel and his three friends emphasize the critical need for the people of God to participate in the wisdom and life of God. The divine wisdom in both the court tales and the visions in the latter part of the book of Daniel suggest that the call to be wise, ethical, and discerning in the midst of suffering and uncertainty draws on the reality that God's wisdom is available to humanity, even when the temporal outcome of a given situation is uncertain.

Teresa Chai concludes this festschrift by summarizing the relationship between pedagogy and mission in the Law, Historical Books, Poetic and Wisdom Literature, and the Prophets. She argues that the Old Testament repeatedly portrays Gentiles and Gentile nations as objects of God's salvation and care and as welcomed citizens within his kingdom, and, accordingly, concludes that the New Testament's Great Commission finds its basis in the Old Testament.

This festschrift will appeal to those who desire to connect Old Testament exegesis and interpretation with practical leadership, especially in relation to Pentecostal and Pacific Asian contexts. In similar yet different ways, each chapter suggests that God can take common people and empower them to become leaders, which is of foundational importance to Kay Fountain, who was born a “common” little girl in New Zealand yet eventually became a minister, educator, church planter, leader, and administrator.

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Spiritual Identity and Spirit Empowered Life: Discover Your Identity in God’s Family, Purpose in God’s Call, and Power in God’s Spirit. By Thomson K. Mathew. Kottayam, Kerala, India: Goodnews Books, 2017. xxvi + 224 pp.

Thomson K. Mathew, recently retired Professor of Pastoral Care and former Dean of the College of Theology and Ministry at Oral Roberts University, has written a truly inspirational and motivational book, whose purpose he clearly states: “I want every follower of Jesus to know that a Christian is one who has been born again into a new identity” (xix). True to its purpose, this book offers ample biblical support and encouragement to Christians to discover their identity, who they are as members of God’s family (part 1), what their purpose in life is as they discern and respond to God’s call (part 2), and what power is available to them by God’s Spirit to be who God made them to be and to do what God has called them to do (part 3).

Mathew has identified three dimensions of the Spirit-empowered Christian life: identity, purpose, and power. The identity of a Christian (chs. 1–5) is rooted firmly in being a child of God, adopted—by divine decree—into God’s family. This makes a Christian a citizen of God’s kingdom as well as a “whole person by faith.” The purpose of every Christian (chs. 6–10) is found in recognizing God’s call and obeying it

by serving, healing, leading, and bearing hope to those who lack a sense of belonging or for whom hope is flagging. The power (chs. 11–15) of Christians is found in recognizing that it is the Spirit of God who has adopted them into the family of God, and as children of God, receiving the gifts, blessing, and empowerment of God's Spirit to realize fully who they are in Christ and to lean into what God has called them to do.

Written to be read either on its own or as part of a fifteen-week study, the book includes a chapter for each week. Each chapter concludes with study questions for further contemplation and discussion. All the chapters make good use of Scripture, biblical stories, and anecdotes to support the central theme. This is, in fact, one of Mathew's strengths: storytelling. He uses stories from each era of his life to highlight and demonstrate the principle he wishes to elucidate in each chapter. These stories have a way of making his writing personal, warm, and real.

Of special significance is Mathew's use of Scripture. He begins each chapter with a pertinent passage that serves as an advanced organizer for the text to follow. In addition, he has a way of stringing scriptural admonitions and promises together to maximize the impact of the biblical truth central to one's identity, purpose, and power.

The book is action oriented, practical, and pastoral. It reminds those who are already Christians of what God has for them. For those who do not know Christ, the book serves as a great invitation into a wonderful global family. Most chapters use at least some bolded first sentences to introduce a more detailed outline of the point made in that particular chapter. These headings pull the reader along with anticipation, deeper into the material. Furthermore, the book provides some resources as footnotes for those who may want to read more about a particular topic. This book is easy to read, yet has an impact beyond its appearance.

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Christian Morality in Ghanaian Pentecostalism: A Theological Analysis of Virtue Theory as a Framework for Integrating Christian and Akan Moral Schemes.

By Lord Abraham Elorm-Donkor. Foreword by Allan Anderson. Oxford, UK. Regnum Press, 2017. xix + 227 pp.

In this volume Lord Abraham Elorm-Donkor re-presents his theological analysis of Ghanaian Christianity in relation to Akan moral patterns, which originally appeared in his University of Manchester doctoral dissertation in 2011. Recalling his own Akan spirituality, the author observes that in the practice of Ghanaian Pentecostalism are many discrepancies between what is preached and taught in some African churches and the moral lives that African Christians actually live in society. He brings together his observations of African traditional religion and African Christianity in relation to the concepts of Deliverance Theology, Virtue Theory, and Wesley's moral theology to explore a possible solution to the separation of spirituality from morality in Ghanaian Pentecostalism, a situation that, he says, calls for theological action (6).

In Chapter 1, Elorm-Donkor explores the Pentecostal concept of Deliverance Theology, which focuses on the power of the Holy Spirit (38) and the way Ghanaian Pentecostals have appropriated it. According to the author, Ghanaian Pentecostals have tended to limit such spiritual deliverance to the localized meaning of the Akan religion practice, which sees such power primarily as a means for meeting existential needs rather than as a way to character formation and inner moral transformation. The way Ghanaian Pentecostals have appropriated Deliverance Theology into African Christianity has created a theological crisis resulting in the division between spirituality and morality (6). Thus Deliverance Theology has become a problem rather than a solution for Ghanaian Christian moral thought and practice (45).

Chapter 2 presents how Deliverance Theology has contributed to the lack of social morality in Ghanaian Pentecostals rather than helping to overcome it. According to Elorm-Donkor, "Akans believe that evil comes from two sources: the supernatural forces (deities when they are

offended, witches, and evil spirits) and human actions” and they also believe that “it is human action that triggers the evil that proceeds from the spiritual realm” (56). Deliverance Theology as appropriated by the Akans, however, “gives much more power to spirit beings than it gives human beings over human action” (47), apparently because of human reluctance to accept responsibility for their actions (56) and preference for blaming evil spirits for immoral behavior (176). The result is “an epistemological crisis,” which occurs “whenever a tradition is no longer able to offer its adherents satisfying answers to their moral questions” (50). Arguably, this crisis has occurred in Ghanaian Pentecostalism because the Deliverance Theology has not been appropriately integrated into the Christian African worldview.

In Chapter 3, Elorm-Donkor presents Virtue Theory as a tool to assess whether a particular worldview enables people to live according to their moral ideal. The author looks at virtue ethics as a more suitable model than deliverance philosophy for contextualizing Christian ethics into African Christianity (67). He examines the moral traditions in Western theology; philosophical perspectives on the concept of character, including aspects of the practice of virtue such as community, personal responsibility, and moral law; and methodological approaches (81–86). He also considers the value of narratives that portray virtuous character and have the ability to touch the heart as a means of communicating moral truth. Such stories provide an explanation for the virtuous life that encourages character development and embodies the truth that is the norm in the community (93). The focus is primarily on character, the central motif of both Akan and Christian traditions (67).

In chapter 4, the author studies the Akan traditions to see how they might help the Akan people to conform to accepted moral beliefs and norms. The purpose is to understand the Akan traditional scheme and to consider whether their worldview can help the Pentecostal Akans to acquire morality successfully (95).

In the fifth chapter, Elorm-Donkor asserts that the moral theology of John Wesley offers a framework that can help Ghanaian believers to live according to the moral ideal of Christian truth (129). One of the distinctives of Wesley’s theology is his doctrine of sanctification. Elorm-Donkor states that in selecting Wesleyan theology he does not intend to

imply that only Wesley's rendition of the Christian truth is authentic; rather his choice is a personal preference based on the historic relationship of Pentecostalism with the Holiness tradition.

Chapter 6 contains a comparison of the Akan and Christian traditions in an attempt to show where the Akan moral scheme needs transformation (167). The Akan tradition does not acknowledge the inherent weakness of humans for knowing and doing what is good and right, whereas Christianity teaches that in creating human beings, God gave them the capacity to exercise their will and choose to do the good, although admittedly it was weakened by the Fall (168). The shaping of people's character in the Akan scheme can be transformed by the introduction of Jesus (190). In the Wesleyan scheme, Jesus is the paradigm, or the model, of character for all those who believe in him while the Holy Spirit is the enabler of the gifts (the charismata) and the virtues necessary for the Christian moral life (194).

This volume, though at times repetitious and detailed, provides significant insight into the historical and theological developments affecting independent indigenous Ghanaian Pentecostalism and Christianity throughout Africa. Elorm-Donkor has argued convincingly that African traditional religion and a misappropriation of Deliverance Theology have had a detrimental influence on the moral attitude of African Christians. It is time for theologians to reflect on this crisis—which until now has not been reflected upon seriously—and to find a way to integrate spirituality and morality in African Christianity. The message that the Holy Spirit has the power to transform the moral character of human beings and conform them to the image of Christ can serve as an empathetic intervention into modern African Christianity.

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