

ORAL ROBERTS: A BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY

HOLY SPIRIT RESEARCH CENTER

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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.

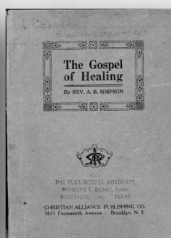
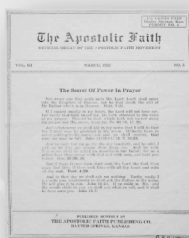
5 *America's Healing Magazine*, November 1955, 21.

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).

Preserve Your Materials With Us

In 1962, Oral Roberts established the Holy Spirit Research Center with the purpose of preserving the materials from the global Spirit-empowered movement. Today, the HSRC is one of the largest and most comprehensive collections in the world. You can help us continue this mission by preserving your materials with us. We gladly welcome donations of the following:

- Past and present books about Holy Spirit related topics.
- Denominational magazines, minutes, and artifacts.
- Materials related to Oral Roberts ministries and ORU.
- Materials from noted Pentecostal and charismatic ministers.
- Materials from international Spirit-empowered communities.



Contact us at hsrc@oru.edu or call 918-495-6899

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

ORU

HOLY SPIRIT RESEARCH CENTER