Three Unique Theological Themes of Oral Roberts' Preaching

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Abstract

The study examines three unique theological themes of Oral Roberts: “Seed-faith,” healing of the whole being, and the “Fourth Man.” Since his message was a reflection of his theology, I also investigate his theological formation, informed particularly by his experiences such as miraculous healing.

Introduction

One of the most prominent Pentecostal-Charismatic preachers is Oral Roberts. Pentecostal-Charismatic preaching is characterized by giving the Word’s authority and placing great value upon the authority and power of the Holy Spirit that comes from the anointing of Spirit.¹ These preachers have an unwavering assurance in God’s power, declaring it in the lives of Christians in the present. They argue that their supernatural experiences array with Scripture. God’s involvement is spontaneously proclaimed and anticipated. God is experienced in Pentecostal-Charismatic worship in rather touchable ways. Subsequently, preachers preach life-connected problems such as sickness, deficiency, family problems, etc.²

I became acquainted with Oral Roberts (1918–2009) as a relatively newer member of Oral Roberts University. Observing the unique ethos of the institution, I began to probe the life and ministry of its founder. As I learned of his life and ministry, an image began to emerge of this preacher and Christian statesman, a powerful social influence to the American perception of Pentecostal Christianity from the mid-twentieth century with a good dose of controversies. As a popular preacher with the largest “pulpit” reaching out to potentially every household of the
nation, my research took me on a journey of discovery of this intriguing figure. As I read and listened to sermons, several unique themes soon emerged: the rule of “Seed-faith,” healing of the whole person, and the “Fourth Man.” As a preacher before theologian, his theology was mostly expressed through his sermons (and books), and they also had practical consequences for his institutional management. Then I looked into his life more closely to investigate the roots of his theological formation, and I identified another three key experiences that played pivotal roles. Thus, the study begins with the formation of his theology and discusses the unique theological concepts he regularly preached.

**Spiritual and Theological Formation**

The theological formation of Oral Roberts is rooted in various experiences throughout his life. I begin with his healing experience as the starting point of his healing ministry. His entire theology appears to have evolved around the concept of healing. The second is his identity formation, both physical and spiritual, and its implications for his ministry. The third is his understanding of anointing, which set the ethos of his preaching ministry.

**Healing Experience**

Born of a Cherokee mother and a Holiness Pentecostal preacher father in 1918, Roberts grew up in an Oklahoma pastor’s home. As Pentecostals, his parents devoted themselves to serving God with the expectation of God’s supernatural provision for their daily life and supernatural manifestations for their ministry. Although fully acquainted with his parents’ belief, there is no definite evidence that the young Roberts had developed an understanding and knowledge of the supernatural works of God’s miracles and healing. Indeed, regretting the chronic poverty of the family, he moved away from his hometown for his high school education as a basketball player. When he was dying of tuberculosis, he had become a hopeless young man, bound to the sickbed for 163 gloomy days. The fatal disease was common among his mother’s people, the Cherokee Indians of Oklahoma. His healing experience in 1935 has been recounted in his autobiographies. It is worth repeating here not only for its details but also for how he perceived the experience.

While I looked at him, Papa’s countenance changed in my sight. A bright light seemed to envelop him, and suddenly, the likeness of Jesus
appeared in his face! From the depths of my soul, I called on the name of Jesus for the first time even to save my soul and my life! I felt God’s presence go through my whole being. My spirit, mind, and body felt like they were suffused with God’s presence. I felt strength enter my body that had not been there for months.³

At the same time, a revival meeting was held in Pontotoc County by a healing evangelist where God’s outburst of healing power was manifested. After a long service, the sick lined up to be prayed for by the evangelist. Roberts was the last one in the healing line. Finally, the preacher, George Moncey, came over and laid his hands on his head and commanded the illness that was binding him: “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.”⁴

During the prayer, Roberts sensed “something like an electrical shock” going through his entire body. Then a “strong warming sensation” ran into him. He felt “his lungs open like a flower, and the most exhilarating energy swept over him.” Soon he could breathe from his lungs all the way down without coughing, severe rushing agony, or feebleness. He shouted, “I’m healed! I’m healed.” Then, “he cried, laughed, and praised God.” People in the tent watched him overjoyed, jumped to their feet, and all the people brought glory to God.⁵

During the subsequent period of full recovery, he diligently studied the Scripture and learned of God’s promise: “They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:18). He believed that the calling he received from the Lord was an even more significant spiritual experience. Roberts claimed that he heard God’s audible voice: “You are to take My healing power to your generation.” He also stated that the Lord gave the vision to establish a university: “You are to build Me a university and build it on My authority and the Holy Spirit.”⁶ His healing experience was part of an enormous spiritual transformation, which was a total turning point in his life.

This experience had firstly impacted his personal life. This watershed encounter led him through regeneration and God’s call to preach. His encounter with the supernatural power of God also led him earnestly to seek the gift of healing. Understanding that God’s power would only come through a close relationship with God,⁷ he diligently read the Bible, often repeating the same books in the Bible over, again and again, to be able to understand more deeply. He also learned to hear God’s voice, which had become another routine claim of his: “The Lord spoke to me.”
Secondly, the experience set healing as the primary theological agenda for his ministry. Through his colorful and sometimes controversial life as a preacher, evangelistic, educator, and church statesman, he is best remembered as a healing evangelist. In a sense, his passion for healing remained unchanged even if the modality of his ministry evolved into several platforms: tent meetings, TV preaching, international meetings, university, and a medical school. For instance, the voice he heard had become the Vision Statement of Oral Roberts University. The establishment of the university is the continuation of his healing ministry.

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.8

The primary focus of healing in his ministry is later reflected on and affirmed by him:

My healing ministry of forty-eight continuous years spans nearly one-fifth of the life of this country. I have conducted approximately three hundred healing crusades, given thousands of sermons and speeches, prayed for the healing of the sick in person in forty-six states in America and seventy nations in all continents.9

“To Become an Original”10

In the early years of his ministry, Roberts had a notion that he had to imitate what other famous preachers did to be successful in his preaching. As a young Pentecostal preacher, there were many fiery preachers and evangelists, including his own father, whom young aspiring ministers were eager to imitate. Soon, he realized, however, that he had made a grave mistake to become an “echo” rather than a “voice,” believing that it was not what God wanted him to do. This was an important shift in his understanding of preaching: from the style to the content of the message.

Thus, he began to read the Bible several times a year and studied each passage’s historical background and central teachings. Roberts dug in-depth into the words. One day, according to him, Jesus told him to read through the four Gospels and the book of Acts three times in thirty days, and “do it on his knees.” Then, “he [God] would show him Jesus and His healing ways.”11 When he preached and taught the words, he sensed he was standing on firm ground. The
word, he believed, provided a firm foundation and practical wisdom both for our
day-to-day life and in perpetuity. And this was God’s way for Roberts to develop
his unique and authentic ministry:

To become the original God intended me to be, I not only had to change my methods for studying the Bible, but I also had to receive revelation knowledge on how to incorporate the healing ministry into my preaching and teaching. For this, I studied how Jesus did it, and little did I know that this would help transform the world. I was about to see the invisible!

Another encounter with Jesus took him a step further toward his unique ministry. As he was reading the miracle account of John 5:1–9, the Spirit overcame him, and God spoke to him: “[You are] not to be like other men, nor like any denomination, but to be like Jesus and heal the people as He did.” Then, he recognized that he had unknowingly preached to conform to his Holiness Pentecostal denomination. He also became aware that he had preached to please the audience “instead of burning inside to see the sick, hurting, and lost people delivered and established in the life of Jesus.” In the course of his continuing reflection and study of the Bible, he developed an earnest desire to have “the whole of Jesus in the ‘now’ of my life,” although he recognized that he “could never be Jesus or do His works remotely as well.”

This subtle and progressive experience had a long-lasting effect on Roberts’ spirituality, theology, and ministry. The first was the formation of his identity, both biological and spiritual. From his early years, he was conscious of his racial identity as his part-Cherokee mother had exerted significant influence over him. He took his identity as a unique gift to bridge the whites and the blacks: “I am part Cherokee Indian myself. I am neither white nor black. I often say, ‘I am in between.’” This statement had a particular significance as Tulsa, Oklahoma, the headquarters of his ministry and later university, had a grim history of racial conflict and massacre in 1921. Throughout his ministry, he actively sought the integration of the whites and the blacks, even when segregation was a norm and even mandated. The second is his passion for God’s word, which guided him, among others, to pattern his healing ministry after Jesus’. As he tried to imitate him in healing, he discovered that at heart is the deep love and compassion for people who suffered. His devotion to the study of the Bible was evident not only in his preaching but also in his publications, such as the three-volume New Testament
commentary. The third is the boldness or even audacity that he developed theological concepts and ministry methodologies. The next section elaborates on three theological topics he often preached. His understanding of anointing (as discussed below) represents his unique spirituality in ministry. The fourth is his radical decisions of ministry, always with a strong conviction of God’s specific directives. His groundbreaking TV enterprise was an example. With his foresight and swift adaptivity, he once made a transition from the tent meetings to radio preaching, which was aired over one hundred radio stations throughout the United States. When television became more common in American households, he took a massive financial risk by beginning his TV preaching in 1952, eventually reaching out to every household with “the excitement and spiritual anticipation of a Pentecostal healing revival.” As Roberts became a household name in America, he radically propagated his message beyond the Christian circles.

**Anointing**

Perhaps the most frequently used concept for his ministry would be “anointing.” He defines it as he had heard from the Lord: “The anointing is when you’re separated from yourself and filled with My glory, so that when you speak it’s like I am speaking; when you act, it’s like I am acting.” This crucial element was at the center of his life and ministry. He once confessed that his biggest mistake in his early ministry was “overlooking the power of anointing for me.” His prime example for anointed ministry was, as expected, Jesus: “Jesus never attempted to preach—or do anything in His call—without the Spirit of the Lord being upon Him and the power of anointing flowing through His words and actions. When I first saw this, I knew I had been on the wrong track as a young preacher.”

He reasoned the essential role of anointing as he, a stuttering country boy, faced the overwhelming number of people with challenging diversity of illnesses and needs:

> By July 1950, some three years after I had begun the healing ministry, I knew beyond all doubt that facing thousands of people in my crusades as the mere man I was, without having the anointing, would cause me to fall on my face and, worst of all, would cause serious harm to one of the greatest moves of God in our generation. Upon feeling God’s anointing, I felt I could carry out God’s call on me as I stood before the people. God placed me before the types of people which few men of God had faced in such increasingly large numbers, and with
such diverse diseases and sins, since the days of Jesus and His early
disciples during the first century. I had to fight against an
overwhelming sense of being engulfed by the enormity and seriousness
of it all and quitting and returning home.²⁷

Therefore, he refused to preach when he did not feel God’s anointing. For
instance, he conducted a revival meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in July
1950 at the old Metropolitan Auditorium. In his hotel room on that day, he did
not have the assurance of what to preach. He could not sense God’s Spirit flowing
through him while he was praying and reading the Bible. He waited for God’s
anointing to come, but as his driver hurried in with anxiety, stating, “If we don’t go
now, you will be late,” Roberts responded, “Just wait. I’ll either come or let you
know I’m not coming.”²⁸ While he continued in prayer, he heard the unmistakable
voice of God. “The Spirit of the Lord came all over me in an instant, down my
right arm into my right hand. My mind was illuminated. The message I had been
worrying with all day became as clear as the noonday sun. I jumped up, grabbed
my Bible and dashed out the door.”²⁹ When he entered the auditorium, the
audience sensed God’s presence filling the entire place. Many started to cry. When
he moved to the stage, he felt the Holy Spirit take over him. The outcome of the
revival service was indescribable.

The way how he recognized God’s “anointing” involves both spiritual
confidence and sensory “sign” in his right hand, which could activate his own faith
and the people’s.³⁰

The difficulty I have had with the anointing when it comes in my
right hand is twofold. One, the presence of God is so forceful in my
hand that if I am not extremely careful, I will touch the person I am
praying for too hard. In the heat of this experience I have an insatiable
desire to literally drive the sickness or disease or demon or fear or
poverty or any other destructive power out of the person. I confess it is
a driving force possessing me far beyond any powers of my own. My
normal confession appears to be multiplied a thousand times. My
urgency to rid the person of the tormenting power of Satan almost
consumes me.³¹

This unusual pattern may reflect his initial encounter with God’s presence,
such as “something like an electrical shock” and a “strong warming sensation.”
Although he recognized the sovereignty of God in granting his special anointing, he
also earnestly prayed and sought this special presence of God. His university has the futuristic prayer tower at the center of the campus, in which he spent time on a regular basis.

**Three Unique Theological Themes**

Out of innumerable messages he preached, I will present three themes that were primary to him. They would best represent his creative theological orientation, shaped by his understanding of the Bible, spiritual experiences, socio-cultural context, and his Pentecostal heritage. Admirable as they are, controversies also arose as he took their implications further.

**Divine Healing**

Healing is the flagship theme throughout Roberts’ life and ministry. He started his devoted Christian life with his own healing and preached most sermons on the subject. In his massive tent meetings, without exception, there was a long prayer session for healing. As the famous image illustrates, he sat on a chair at the stage, laid his hands on each person (of a long line) for healing. Healing testimonies also flooded his magazines, which were mailed to his supporters. At the peak of his ministry, his monthly magazine had a circulation of more than one million. Also, many of his more than 150 books included a generous amount of healing testimonies. During his seventy-year ministry, he was known as a “healing evangelist.”

There are several elements of his preaching of healing, and all of them were developed from practical perspectives. The first is the involvement of the sick in their whole person in the process of healing. As much as he longed for God’s anointing, he emphatically stressed the role of the faith of the sick. He argued, “the only way to begin your journey to making you whole is to begin in your spirit,” which God shaped in his divine and moral resemblance. With redemption through Christ, God’s nature in our spirit has been restored. He thus urged the sick to “take on this spiritual reality in your being.” “Through it, you can learn to respond to every situation you face by using your spirit—your inner self—then let this response flow up through your mind and body until your response is the whole-person response.” Implicitly, he identifies a disconnect between one’s spirit and his or her Creator and Redeemer as one common cause for illness or conflict. This spiritual root of physical and even material problems is based on his understanding
of human beings (or anthropology). According to him, this spiritual response is required because “your whole life is spiritually based.” The cause and resolution of human problems, according to him, is found on the spirit level. And here he made a pneumatological connection: to resolve this spirit-level problem, we need to go back to “God’s Spirit” working in our spirit. As God re-creates us when we repent of our iniquities and trust in Jesus as our personal Savior, then we experience the work of the Holy Spirit in our daily life.

Roberts specified that God begins with our “will,” elaborating the viewpoint of Jesus: “when any part of you is ill, you are ill.” It is right when it is “psychosomatic or organic or both.” Our will functions through our “mind and body” but initiates in our inner being, our spirit.

Roberts illustrated the involvement of the whole person with an episode of wheelchair victims. After his talk, he invited the attendees to come forward for prayer for healing. As a group on wheelchairs and crutches came for healing, Robert challenged:

You have been in that wheelchair for some time, maybe years. It is your intention and your will to come out of it through prayer, then you must do something first. For example, if you can move any part of your body, do it—if it’s only a finger or a toe. Deep inside is your spirit, your inner person. Your spirit is the only one who can cause your inner man to respond. . . . By responding through your spirit first, your mind will feel the stimulation, including the faith of your soul, and your body is much more likely to feel it too.

While he stressed the role of the sick in the healing process, implicitly featured is the vital role of the mediator who connects God and the sick through admonition to encourage human faith in God.

The second is the partnership between God’s power and the gift of medicines and medical knowledge. As a practical man, from the early days of his ministry, Roberts embraced both divine and medical healing: “I think the key issue for a doctor or one praying for healing is to accept all healing as coming from God.” He pointed out the “mismatch” in many believers’ minds that healing comes through prayer or medicine as if they are mutually exclusive. But God uses both of them, according to Roberts.

This conviction led him to envision a medical school that incorporated prayer and medical knowledge. He announced to his supporters and university that the Lord had told him to
build me a medical school at Oral Roberts University. I want a stream of my healing power to constantly flow out of ORU through prayer and medical science as well. I want you to raise up Christian doctors who will accept my healing power in its fullness. They will do all they can through prayer, and they will do all they can through medicine.\(^{38}\)

Against harsh oppositions from the established medical institutions and schools, he succeeded in securing necessary approvals to open the medical school in 1978. Then the three-tower medical complex was constructed to house the school, hospital, and research facilities called the City of Faith. The integration of God’s healing power and medical knowledge was visibly illustrated by the massive statue of two hands folded together in front of the City of Faith medical complex. Now relocated to the entrance of Oral Roberts University, it is the “healing hands,” signifying God’s supernatural healing and healing through medicine: or Paul and Luke.\(^{39}\)

The third is his desire and plan to expand the healing movement and multiply God’s healing servants. Roberts spread his healing message beyond the United States. His international meetings were held in Latin America, Asia, and Australia with success. When he established Oral Roberts University in 1965, his original plan was to train evangelists with healing ministry from all over the world. Thus, the university was initially called the School of Evangelism.\(^{40}\) When the institution became a fully functioning liberal arts university, Roberts’ idea was to prepare the students to reach every section of the world, or “every man’s world,” as ministers, educators, journalists, artists, engineers, business people, and medical professionals.\(^{41}\) A founding faculty member of the medical school recalled that Roberts had a clear missional purpose for the school: to become a medical missionary training school.\(^{42}\)

Fourthly, related to the preceding discussion, he decided to organize a mobile evangelistic team to reach many parts of the world through the “healing teams.”\(^{43}\) He shared his reasoning in *Abundant Life*:

> 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 someday. 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, 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

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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.\(^4^4\)

Roberts’ vision was to have a minimum of 1,000 healing groups working everywhere in the world by the twenty-first century. He was placing the chief fundraising labors at ORU to send these teams to impact world missions and implement an excellent commission task.\(^4^5\)

Although only one full-scale team was sent, the concept continued to the present day in various forms. The last is the development and expansion of his healing theology. I already observed his understanding of the “whole person” in the healing process. Roberts often preached that Jesus is the rebuilder of human life and healer of the full person—body, mind (mental and emotional), and spirit. Subsequently, the ministry of healing was expanded to include marriage, finances, business, and even various relationships.\(^4^6\) For example, Oral Roberts University opened the state-of-the-art aerobic center in 1965. All the students, including doctoral ones, are required to fulfill physical exercise requirements. As mentioned above, healing was applied to racial struggles.

**Seed Faith**

The second central theme in Roberts’ preaching is that of “Seed-Faith.” Roberts argued that faith is the seed, crucial to experience God’s miracle. He based this life principle on two passages: Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows”; and Matthew 17:20, “if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there, and it will move.’” Once the seed or faith is sown, it will multiply countless times.\(^4^7\)

He then developed three principles of the “Seed-Faith” rule. The first is God is the total source for his children’s needs, often referring to Philippians 4:19, “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Despite the common human tendency to search for answers from fellow human beings, he stressed, God is the ultimate source. However, he recognized human instrumentality.\(^4^8\)

In looking for your needs to be met, remember it’s not what is your source, but Who is your Source? You may think it’s the man you are dealing with but he is only an instrument. You are dealing directly with God as the loving Being who is THE Source of your supply. By
looking to Him, you are confident, you are positive, you are expectant that He will provide.⁴⁹

The second principle is to “give that it may be given to you.” He used Luke 6:38 to support this principle: “Give, and it shall be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” He not only preached on this principle of generosity but also practiced it. For example, he once gave little money to his ministry amid a financial struggle, but, after he offered to God, he sensed a warm radiance come all over his body, and he had a delightful heart. Not long after this, a man knocked at his door at two o’clock in the morning and expressed God’s irresistible urge to give to Roberts’ ministry. That day, Roberts received from him seven times more than he earlier offered to the Lord.⁵⁰ When he thanked the man for his generosity, he responded, “Don’t thank me. I’m a wheat farmer, and I know by experience that the yield I get from my land is in direct proportion to the seed I plant.” He went on, “Brother Roberts, this is just seed I’ve been needing to plant for a long time.”⁵¹ Roberts stressed the importance of giving: “If you want God to supply your financial needs, then give SEED MONEY for Him to reproduce and multiply. If your need is not money but something else, let the seed you give represent it. Use it as your point of contact to release your faith for God to meet this need.”⁵² This was the beginning of his controversial “blessing-pact covenant.”

The third principle is the anticipation of miracles. Using the illustration of farming, the expectation of a harvest, much larger than the seed, is natural and essential. Once the seeding is done, according to him, his children should expect God’s miracle. This emphasis of expecting and eagerly yearning for God’s miracle culminated in the publication of Expect a Miracle (1995), which has sold more than 100,000 copies. Although he began the Seed-Faith teaching with material blessing in mind, he soon expanded the rule to every aspect of life.

While this teaching became popular, it also received extensive criticism, both from media and academics. One of its theological challenges is the sovereignty of God, as the teaching was presented as a “rule,” almost obligating God to bless in return to the seed. As a tangible expression of this belief, he devised the “blessing-pact covenant.”

He argued, “Your Blessing Pact giving is a higher law of faith. You give BEFORE you have received, you give as seed money for God to multiply back to you.”⁵³ The emphasis on giving out of your need was a crucial step that fueled the
idea of the prosperity gospel. Rather than giving because one has prosperity, one gives as a way to achieve prosperity. The financial demands of the university led him to emphasize that “sowing” into God’s ministry through the “blessing pact” was a way to “reap a harvest” for a person’s own need.\(^5\) This was the basis of his intense fundraising campaign to develop the 500-acre campus of Oral Roberts University in the 1960s through the 1980s.

“The Fourth Man”

The third key theme in his preaching is the “Fourth Man.” Although neither original to him nor controversial among his theological themes, he was best known for his signature statements such as “God is a good God” and “Something good is going to happen today.”\(^5\) The topic of the “Fourth Man,” therefore, was one of Roberts’ favorite messages based on the experience of Daniel’s three friends. He began his message with the might of Babylon, its invasion of Jerusalem, the destruction of the city and the nation, and the devastation of the temple. The exile of the elite population followed, and among the hostages were Daniel and his three friends. The core of his message was their unrelenting faith, rebuffing worship to the Babylonian god. They were well aware of the deadly consequence of their refusal (Dan 3:15). In the middle of the blazing furnace, they were fully protected by God with the presence of the “Fourth Man.”

Roberts emphatically declared that the “Fourth Man” was not accountable for Nebuchadnezzar’s notorious act of flinging the young men into the burning furnace, but he became responsible for taking them out: “he did not stoke the furnace, but he did rob the fire of its violence, he did not bind them, but he did liberate them from their bonds, he did not send them into the furnace, but he did bring them out.”\(^5\)

The message of the “Fourth Man,” whose identity was assumed to be the pre-incarnate Christ, provides significant lessons. Firstly, when God’s people want to live a godly life by practicing faith, surroundings and environment will have no control over them. Their faith will open up a trail for them in the desert, make an “oasis,” and will make them feel life as “running through a troop and jumping over a wall.”\(^5\) It is what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego experienced. Secondly, it teaches the almightiness of God: he can make all things possible. The three men were confident that their God was able to protect and redeem them. Nebuchadnezzar successfully locked them in the furnace, but he was unable to lock their God out. He could separate them from their surroundings but could not
isolate them from their God.\textsuperscript{58} Thirdly, Roberts used this passage to stress the importance of uncompromising faith and obedience to God. He put the lesson this way: “If you bow, you will burn. But if you will not bow, you cannot burn. God will take care of you.”\textsuperscript{59}

The overall message of the “Fourth Man” is God’s enduring presence among God’s children, especially in their difficulties and hardship. Roberts found the entire account readily applicable to modern listeners, finding themselves in the difficulties, trials, and suffering of the fiery furnace. He particularly focused on the suffering of God’s people for their faith: “Millions of people have been thrown into fiery furnaces heated seven times hot. You have been thrown into the furnace for your testimony, your integrity, and conviction. You would not bow.”\textsuperscript{60} This message assured God’s abiding presence to be with his people to the end of the age, protecting, providing, and guiding.

**Conclusion**

As a way of introduction to the spiritual and theological world of Oral Roberts, I investigated three key experiences that contributed to the formation of his spirituality and theology. His resolve to be an “original” opened his mind to the limitless possibilities, his own healing experience set his primary ministry, and “anointing” set the mode of his spirituality. The three theological themes were the manifestation of his spiritual and theological orientation in his life and ministry. As expected, his understanding of healing occupied the center of his attention, while it was progressively expanded to include all forms of restoration. Seed-Faith, perhaps the most controversial, set a simple “rule” for God’s people to avail of his miraculous provision. He also brought the promise of God’s presence through the “Fourth Man” from a passive expectation to an active pursuit.

Through the course of the research, I also stumbled into other unique themes of his theology. For example, the “point of contact” was a concept he used repeatedly. It could be a tangible object or gesture that would mediate a spiritual experience.\textsuperscript{61} Using Moses’ action to lift up his rod and stretch his hand over the sea so that it would be divided (Exod 14:16), a physical action, such as touching the TV set as one watches his preaching, would activate and release his or her faith for God’s miracle.\textsuperscript{62} This may suggest that there is much to investigate on Roberts’ theology.

While I tried to fathom the how, why, and what of his spiritual and theological world, the underlying passion of Roberts was the suffering of human beings. Everyone agreed that he was a persuasive communicator, having overcome
the challenge of stuttering and low esteem. However, the root of his passion was that Christ has the answer to all human suffering. Indeed, Christ is the answer! He was well acquainted with suffering and grief. Poverty was part of his daily life, and so was illness. He lost a son to drugs and depression and a daughter in a plane crash. He knew miracles as well as failures. But through his seven decades of ministry, his message did not change: “God is good” and “He brings miracles.” With this deep sense of a divine call, it is natural that Roberts was deeply committed to maintaining the “anointing” of the Holy Spirit.

He brought Pentecostal healing from the church pulpit into living rooms of ordinary households, regardless of their religious orientation, through his TV preaching. His influence is also global. Riding on the wave of mass media, he left hundreds of audio and video recordings, available on YouTube and ORU’s Digital Showcase. When I traveled to Lusaka, Zambia, several years ago, his preaching was aired on a public TV station. And his impact will continue as his material is readily available.

There will not be another Oral Roberts, but the legacy of his preaching lives on. And his passion for God’s healing is ever more relevant in today’s broken world. This study explored only one aspect of his preaching: the message with underlying theology. Preaching is a live oral communication, which involves various elements to form Pentecostal preaching. The ultimate outcome is persuasion: strengthening one’s faith, moving to action (such as coming forward for prayer), and surrendering oneself to God’s grace and power. In this process, the role of the preacher is crucial. Roberts’ preaching, therefore, remains a fruitful and rich area of research.

Notes


4 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 33.

5 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 32–33.


9 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, vi.


11 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 68.


16 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 76.


20 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 71.


24 Roberts, *Still Doing the Impossible*, 78. See also, Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 104.


26 Roberts, *Still Doing the Impossible*, 70.

27 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 103.


29 Roberts, *Still Doing the Impossible*, 78. See also, Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 104.

30 Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 103.


32 The ministry magazine, originally titled *Healing Waters*, was renamed *Abundant Life* in 1956.
Three Unique Theological Themes


40 Email interview with Daniel Isgrigg, 11 January 2021.


