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**Oral Roberts, remembrance and reflections**

We On Faith panelists have been invited, on the occasion of his death, to comment on the life and influence of Oral Roberts. I was no follower of his, but our lives had some tangencies which may add a few dabs of paint to his memorial portrait. I comment with reluctance, from fear that anyone might think him on my name-drop list of those whose fame might rub off on me were I to mention them: he was not, though I admired him for his *steady intention to be faithful to Jesus* and for his high-octane spirit of*courageous innovation*.

1.....We were World-War-One American babies, he born 11 days before I was. At age 17, we had life-changing experiences - he, a rare physical healing, for which he praised God; I, a spiritual healing, a conversion to Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. When he asked me to teach New Testament at the university he founded, and where I would have had thousands more students, I declined: I was satisfied to continue as the dean of exploratory programs at New York Theological Seminary (NYC).

2.....But there were two other reasons I did not accept his invitation. The minor reason was that I did not want to be associated with his "enthusiastic" *excesses* of "charismatic" inspiration: I was no Pentecostal, and he was, at that time, the world's most spectacular Pentecostal. The major reason was that no way would he have long put up with my liberalism. He knew me only as an evangelical scholar with a University of Chicago PhD in biblical studies, but he did not know me as a liberal - a libergelical.

3.....As a Pentecostal minister, Oral was following in his father's footsteps. He achieved the usual two academic degrees preparatory to becoming an ordained Protestant clergyman. He spoke easily, joyfully, of his personal encounters with Jesus and the consequence: he was, he said, called "not to be an echo, but a voice like Jesus." And he was often well-described as "*on fire for Jesus*."

4....Oral was "Mr. Pentecostal," the personal symbol of the fastest-spreading form of Christianity with the exception of the "indigenous church" movements. In addition to his televangelistic work, he led some 300 evangelistic campaigns on six continents, wrote scores of books, and founded a university which today has almost 3,800 students and is in good financial condition.

5.....Other than "speaking in tongues," faith-healing is the most prominent feature of the Pentecostalism, though it is not unique to this movement. As a precursor of "the healing of the nations" (the full-coming of the kingdom of God [as Jesus said in the Lord's Prayer] "on earth as it is in heaven"), Jesus often healed the sick and the disabled. To that end, in the course of his life-ministry, Oral laid hands on several million people. Early in the month he died, he said to the president of his university that "evangelicals should strive in many [creative] ways that give glory to God."

6.....Hope is hard to come by in our time, and the likes of Oral Roberts remind us of what God said through Jeremiah, that realistic prophet of gloom and glory: "I have plans to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). Schools emerging from preaching are physical manifestations of the future as hope.
I'll close with three instances.
6.1
*Before radio and television*, TEMPLE UNIVERSITY emerged from a fund raised by the Rev. Russell Conwell (pastor of the Baptist Temple, Philadelphia) from his preaching - more than 1,000 times and places - of one sermon, "Acres of Diamonds." In 1887, Dr. Conwell became the university's first president. (Dr. Harris, Dr. Conwell's last assistant at the Baptist Temple, dedicated the first of my sons.)
6.2
*Before television*, the Rev. Charles Fuller developed his "Old Fashioned Revival Hour" into a world network of hundreds of radio stations. (For some time in the 1930s, I listened to his weekly broadcast.) From his ministry came the flagship of evangelical theological schools, FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, which he cofounded in 1947 as a post-fundamentalist but evangelical graduate school - now the world's largest multi-denominational Christian seminary, with more than 4,000 students.
6.3
*In the television age*, the Rev. Oral Roberts, on the basis of income from his television broadcasting, in 1963 founded ORAL ROBERTS UNIVERSITY (the dedicatory address being given by Billy Graham, his only superior as a televangelist).

7.....Presently,*computer evangelism* has many forms but no nickname.

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  DECEMBER 17, 2009; 8:34 PM ETSAVE & SHARE:                       
PREVIOUS:**[**ORAL ROBERTS'S SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND ERRORS**](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/r_albert_mohler_jr/2009/12/the_death_of_oral_roberts.html)**| NEXT:**[**GORE'S CONVENIENT HALF-TRUTH**](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/ramdas_lamb/2009/12/gores_convenient_half-truth.html)

**Comments**

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When I was a college student in India,
I read his biography in a Christian
publication. Later on, in response to my
request, I got his books and "Abundant
Life" magazine, free of cost.

His autography and several books on faith
inspired my life greatly. When he came
to India in 1964 to speak in Trivandrum,
I went to hear him. His message was very
simple but with divine authority.

I have watched him in T.V. many times.
He was the father of the modern charismatic
movement, no 2 Christian leader (second to
Billy Graham) and there was no stain in
his personal life. He had his share of
personal tragedies and rotten criticism
from the world, but he always said "God is good". In my life, I repeat after him when
I have faced with personal pains " God is good".

**POSTED BY: CARPETMATHEW | DECEMBER 25, 2009 5:41 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

As a graduate of the seminary at ORU I think you may have been more accepted than you realize. Several of the professors were from mainline backgrounds and were quite liberal--advanced degrees from liberal seminaries, with a liberal outlook. Oral's main criteria as I understand it was openness to life in the Spirit, including experiencing the Spirit in the here and now in the ways described in the NT. Roman Catholics have no problem with this idea and have been quite receptive of charismatic gifts. Protestants, on the other hand, liberal and conservative, have been far more reluctant. I think stems in part from the fact that much of the Protestant Reformation was an intellectual battle--based on the interpretation of texts and scholarship. This led to an unhealthy rationalistic bent among Protestants.
www.GodintheNow.com

**POSTED BY: DAVIDPETERSON1 | DECEMBER 22, 2009 9:00 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Reverend,

This is a thoughtful, informative assessment.
It is good that you have spoken of Roberts' legacy.

I do not hold with his doctrine; however, I think that Pentecostalism does give hope to many people, does help them to feal less alone, experience less fear.

It simply is not the case that Roberts did no good in his life, whatever one may think of his theology.

Thank you for your essay.

**POSTED BY: FARNAZ1MANSOURI1 | DECEMBER 19, 2009 11:29 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

As a child observing him on television, I found him to be a little scarey.

**POSTED BY: DANIELINTHELIONSDEN | DECEMBER 18, 2009 3:50 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

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