

ORU—"OUR" University

By Jamie Buckingham

Despite what some think of Oral Roberts, there is no denying God has used him in a powerful way. In the early '60s, saying God told him to do it, Roberts set out to build a university for a church that didn't exist at the time—the church renewed by the Holy Spirit.

During a dinner with Pat Robertson one evening in June 1960, Roberts began to write on his napkin the words that changed the course of his ministry: "Raise up your students to hear My voice, to go where My light is dim, where My voice is small and My healing power is not known. To go even to the uttermost bounds of the earth. Their work will exceed yours. And in this, I am well pleased."

A lot of things were stirring in the late '50s and early '60s. Episcopal priest Dennis Bennett spoke in tongues, Demos Shakarian started the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship and John Sherrill began work on a book called *They Speak With Other Tongues*.

Isolated groups around the nation—mostly in denominational churches—were being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Roman Catholics in Pittsburgh, South Bend and New Orleans were speaking in tongues. And Oral Roberts, a Pentecostal Holiness healing evangelist, folded his tent, saying God had told him to build a university to train the generations with educational excellence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Roberts, one of the first evangelists to use television, was despised by the cultural church leaders because he integrated his meetings and practiced healing. But the poor, the sick and the downcast loved him because he walked among them with a message no one else was preaching. He told the people that God is a good God—a God who provides.

"Something good is going to happen to you," Roberts told the blacks, the unemployed and the desperately ill. They believed him and were healed. They loved him, supported him, and indeed something good did begin to happen to them. And, as Noah responded to God's mandate to build an ark, Roberts started



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work on his academic center in Tulsa. Chartered in 1963, Oral Roberts University opened its doors in 1965. This year it graduated its 10,000th student.

Roberts remains controversial. His fund-raising methods smack of his tent revival days and are offensive to many. A writer in *Christianity Today* recently compared him with John Tetzels of the Dark Ages who raised money for the Catholic Church by selling indulgences. Roberts' "God-will-call-me-home-if-you-don't-give-me-\$8-million" statement even embarrassed many of his staunchest supporters. But he was desperate to save his medical school to send missionary doctors overseas. My conclusion: Until you've done what he's done, keep your opinions to yourself!

Recently I sat with Larry Lea, dean of the "Signs and Wonders" seminary at ORU. Under Lea's leadership the seminary has received full accreditation from the Association of Theological Seminaries for the next 10 years—one of only 11 seminaries in the United States to be fully accredited in all major areas of study: theology, music and education.

Like me, Lea is a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He reminded me that Southern Baptists have become the world's largest non-Catholic denomination because they have majored on training Christian leaders in Bible-honoring seminaries.

But what is happening in Baptist universities is a different story. Like most

denominational schools, many Baptist colleges have slipped their early Christian moorings and drifted into theological liberalism and educational humanism.

Recently I received the trustee's report on "university priorities" from my Baptist alma mater, Mercer University. Sadly, Jesus Christ is not mentioned in the entire 31-page report. The university does affirm "religious and moral values that arise from the Judeo-Christian understanding of the world" and "encourages respect for religious diversity."

The Pentecostal colleges are doing what they can. The Assemblies of God have Evangel and other small schools. Tiny Emmanuel College, belonging to the Pentecostal Holiness camp, is doing an excellent job. Lee College is supported by the Church of God. But all these have denominational ties. Protestants are welcome at the University of Steubenville, where the Spirit-filled life is emphasized. But it remains a Roman Catholic school. Wheaton, Gordon, Biola, Columbia Bible College, John Brown University and others provide excellent Christian education, but some actually teach *against* the Holy Spirit's miracle power.

Where, then, do the 100,000 independent charismatic churches of America send their young people for education? Where can the renewed Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist youth go for Spirit-led training? Southern Methodist University? Emory? Wake Forest? Bob Jones? Who wants to send his or her young people to a school which teaches against the Bible—or one that teaches against the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

ORU stands alone in training students to utilize the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives and their professions.

For 25 years Oral Roberts, now 70, has raised money to finance the university. But that money is drying up as his partners die off. Support now must come from the Spirit-filled people and churches of America. What will it take? Thirty thousand people giving \$100 per month plus 20,000 churches doing the same.

Why not? After all ORU is OUR university. ■