

And God Said to Oral: Build a Hospital

The 777-bed edifice going up at Oral Roberts University is opposed by infidels who say Tulsa already has a surplus of 1000 beds

God said, "Son, you cannot put the vision I have given you into a place where My full healing power is not freely accepted. It must not be in a place defeated by a lack of faith in My miraculous power. You must build a new and different medical center for Me. The healing streams of prayer and medicine must merge through what I will have you build. . . ."

Then rising before me were the details of the buildings.

In August 1977, while deep in a desert somewhere in the Southwest and even deeper into a conversation with the Almighty, Oral Roberts had a vision. That vision is fast becoming a \$250 million reality located a stone's throw from the \$150 million, 4000 student Oral Roberts University (ORU) in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Despite a long procession of cement trucks at the site, all is not going as God intended. For Roberts, the vision has resulted in lawsuits by Tulsa area hospitals to halt construction, the demoralization of his donors and resulting destabilization of his cash flow, a handful of media exposés, the flight of a top lieutenant, and a whole raft of questions about the future of his evangelical empire.

Just why the world's most famous faith healer is erecting a quarter-billion-dollar monument to the wonders of modern medicine is not especially clear. In a 22-page booklet that gets mailed to supporters, *I Will Rain on Your Desert*, Roberts tells how God commanded him to build a 60-story diagnostic clinic, a 30-story, 777-bed hospital, and a 20-story research center. But some of those not privy to Roberts' conversations with God are confused. Not only are faith-healing and modern medicine seemingly at odds, but Tulsa already has a surplus of 1000 hospital beds.

Despite moves by the medical establishment to block the hospital, with a suit currently in the Oklahoma supreme court, construction continues. It is probably unrealistic for critics to expect anything else. After all, Roberts is following the commands of the Lord, and those commands can translate into political and economic clout. Take the "partners," the people who support Roberts'

ministry. In one response to the evangelist's God-inspired plea, they fired off 400,000 pro-hospital letters to Oklahoma legislators and health officials. And when Roberts last summer admitted that he was in "a financial crunch" and begged on his nationally syndicated TV show for a \$50 million boost so construction could continue, the partners came through with flying colors. It is estimated they

tential management problems in running a hospital and Ron Smith agreed to contact executives of Hospital Corporation of America."

Last August, Ron Smith suddenly resigned his post as executive vice president of ORU and moved out of Tulsa, saying only that he was going "to pursue some personal business interests." In his book, Sholes also notes that in two sepa-



Photo by W. J. Broad

The shell of the hospital (right) is already complete.

are now supplying him with \$10 million a month.

Suddenly God gave me a new name for the Health Care and Research Center I am to build in His Name. "You shall call it the City of Faith."

One critic who questions not only the divine origin of the name for the medical center but also that the inspiration came in the desert is Jerry Sholes, a TV producer who after 3 years with Roberts quit to write an exposé entitled *Give Me That Prime Time Religion*. Sholes says the vision in the "desert" actually occurred at Roberts' million-dollar vacation home in Palm Springs, and that 7 months earlier, Sholes, Roberts, and his longtime second in command, Ron Smith, met in Sholes' office and discussed a three-building complex that would include a clinic, a research center, and a hotel that would eventually be converted into a hospital. "We even went so far in that conversation as to discuss unit costs on the parking lots which would surround the three-building complex," Sholes writes. "We also discussed po-

rate articles about Oral Roberts, one in a 1955 issue of *Coronet* and one in a 1956 issue of *American* magazine, the evangelist is quoted as saying he was getting ready to build a "City of Faith" that would be his new Corporate Headquarters.

I said, "But won't it take millions of dollars to build all of this?"

God said, "In the master plan I have given you I have taken the total cost and reduced it to a perfect number. The number is from \$77 to \$777. Of course, sometimes I may put another amount into the heart of a partner."

When money got tight, Roberts worked God's financial arrangements downward to include donations as small as \$7.77. Hebraic folklore invests the number 7 with a promise of "wholeness" that Roberts likes to employ. At the groundbreaking for the City of Faith, 77 white doves fluttered heavenward as the preacher dug a gold-painted shovel into the dirt on the ORU campus at 7777 South Lewis Avenue. On occasion, however, Roberts is forced out of the rut of

symbolic sevens. In one recent appeal to his flock, he revealed that God told him to make an imprint of his right hand on swatches of cloth, which he would send free to partners. Roberts promised "special miracles" to partners who touched the cloth, but he also asked for something special in return. Specifically, he urged partners to enter into a "Blessing-Pact Covenant" with God by purchasing a portion of the City of Faith—at \$38 a square foot.

I asked, "When do I start construction, Lord?"

He said, "I told you there would be a breakthrough from heaven in '77. Therefore, you are to start in the fall of 1977."

Despite God's wishes, things got off to a slow start and the groundbreaking had to be delayed until 24 January 1978—Oral's 60th birthday. In any case, 1977 was a bad year. Roberts' oldest daughter, Rebecca, and her husband died that February in a plane crash. The tragedy shook Roberts, who had been looking for a "breakthrough from heaven in '77." It was in response to "the devil trying to mock" him with the deaths that he went to the desert and had his vision.

I asked the Lord, "How much of the City of Faith, consisting of the clinic and diagnostic center, the research center, and the 777-bed medical center, shall I start constructing now?"

He said, "Starting now you are to build all of it at the same time, the whole of it, leaving nothing out that I have told you."

This divine order has also been cut to fit, and the hospital is now slated for 294 beds. The reason is quite down-to-earth. Under the 1974 National Health Planning and Resource Development Act, an effort by Congress to cut down on expensive and redundant medical facilities, state and regional planners must certify that new health-care centers are needed. The certifier in Oklahoma is the three-member Oklahoma Health Planning Commission (OHPC), with the 30-member Oklahoma Health Systems Agency serving as an advisory panel.

In early 1978, the agency advised against certification on the grounds that Tulsa already had too many unused hospital beds. "After all the devil has done to stop us," said Roberts at the time, "we are still on the firing line and we will never quit."

Picking up the beat, the Roberts forces asked the OHPC to certify only a 294-bed first-phase of the hospital. The university would still build the whole 30-story building, but equip less than half the shell. Thereafter it would add about 80

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Another Major Delay for Strategic Oil Reserve

The Strategic Petroleum Reserve Program (*Science*, 10 August 1979) continues to occupy a paradoxical position on the national agenda. On the one hand, Carter Administration officials still speak of establishing a large oil reserve in Gulf Coast salt domes as being "critical" to national security. On the other hand, filling the reserve continues to be deferred from one year to the next.

On 3 April, Ruth M. Davis, the assistant secretary of energy for resource applications, explained to a Senate appropriations subcommittee that the Administration has now decided, as part of President Carter's budget-balancing and anti-inflation strategy, to defer putting more oil into the reserve until June 1981. But at the same time Davis told the subcommittee that if past appropriations for the purchase of oil—appropriations now totaling \$4.1 billion—were allowed to expire, the Administration's oil-acquisition strategy would be "severely constrained." She noted that "changes of policy have not been infrequent," and observed that "it's extremely important" to have on hand the necessary storage facilities and funds for resuming filling operations.

Senator Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), who was chairing the hearing, had nothing good to say about the Administration's position. "Sometimes I feel constrained by the subcommittee's policy against political rhetoric," he observed at one point. "I think it's been demonstrated that there is not a national commitment to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve."

Stevens said he will recommend that money previously appropriated for oil purchases be reappropriated for other purposes. But he wants development of oil storage capacity in the Louisiana and east Texas salt domes to continue against the chance that filling the reserve eventually will be resumed.

The goal is to have at least 750 million barrels in the reserve, enough for delivery of 4 to 5 million barrels a day to refineries (via pipelines and coastal tankers) for a period of a half-year or longer. At the moment, only 91.7 million barrels are in storage, and no oil

has been purchased for the reserve since late 1978. The capacity of the reserve is now about 248 million barrels, and, with leaching of the domes continuing, it should increase to 550 million barrels by the end of 1986.

Unconfirmed news reports last year indicated that Saudi Arabia, not wanting to see its influence over world oil prices diminished by a large U.S. oil reserve, had exacted a commitment from Secretary of Energy Charles Duncan that filling of the reserve would not be resumed. In reply to questions from Senator Stevens, Davis said that Duncan had made no commitments to the Saudis and had been asked for none. But she said producing as well as consuming nations would have to be consulted before the United States again began buying oil for the reserve.

Ethics and Drug Ads— A Slip Up in Bangladesh

Any pharmaceutical company with scores of subsidiaries operating around the world will necessarily have to take special pains if all of the people acting in its name are to observe proper ethical standards in marketing company products. Bristol-Myers, Inc., of New York now knows, from an embarrassing episode in Bangladesh, that its past efforts in this regard have not gone far enough.

The company's subsidiary in Dacca published in the 31 January issue of the *Bangladesh Times* an advertisement which refers to "our life-saving anti-cancer drug 'CeeNu Capsules.' . . ." Nowhere does the ad acknowledge that, like other cancer drugs, this one is useful only for treatment of a few specific cancers (brain tumors and Hodgkin's disease) and does not offer an unfailing cure.

Jerry Parrott, director of public relations for Bristol-Myers, told *Science* that, beside the fact the ad was misleading, "it is strictly against company policy to advertise pharmaceutical products in public media in any country, even when permitted by law." He said that Flavio Tomassini, president of the company's international division, has recently dispatched to all of Bristol-Myers' overseas subsidiaries a message to that effect.

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beds a year, each time getting a certificate of need. The Roberts forces also put their computerized mailing operation into high gear, the partners responding with all the zest of true believers. A flood of mail rained down upon Oklahoma legislators and the three members of the OHPC, and the legislature passed a resolution supporting the City of Faith. Sure



AP Photo

Roberts: God is my general contractor.

enough, the revised version of the proposal was accepted by the OHPC, which in the week previous to its 26 April 1978 decision received 300,000 letters from Roberts' partners.

The following December, on the appeal of the Tulsa Hospital Council, a coalition of 15 hospitals, Oklahoma District Judge Ronald N. Ricketts overturned that decision saying there were *already* too many empty hospital beds in Tulsa and that granting a certificate of need to ORU violated the First Amendment separation of church and state. The Roberts forces side-stepped an injunction by taking the case to the Oklahoma supreme court. Pretrial briefs are still being filed, and the trial is not expected to start until this summer. The stakes in this court battle are high. If the City of Faith hospital does not get a certificate of need, it cannot receive reimbursement under Medicare, Medicaid, and such insurers as Blue Cross. From Medicaid and Medicare alone, the City of Faith expects to receive half its income.

God said to me, "People from throughout the world will come to the Health Care Center to receive the best of medical science and the best of healing prayers."

A sort of Mayo Clinic for the Faithful is apparently what the Almighty had in mind. On the basis of anticipated international patient load, the Roberts forces are trying to get around the certificate of need, which is not necessary under fed-

eral guidelines for new hospitals with a national pull. According to James E. Winslow, Jr., an orthopedic surgeon who once tended to the ORU basketball team and who now is vice-provost for medical affairs, more than 30,000 Oral Roberts partners from all over the country show up every year at their own expense to attend weekend spiritual seminars at ORU. If the healthy come, Winslow figures one million sick folk would flock to the City of Faith each year when it is fully operational. Roberts too is optimistic. He recently told a reporter for the *Tulsa World* that he receives nearly 100,000 requests per month from cancer patients, asking him to pray for them. "We're scared out of our wits that when we announce the hospital's open, we're going to be covered up," Roberts says the overflow will go to the hospitals of Tulsa that currently have whole wings out of service, thus giving them business rather than taking it away.

The Tulsa Hospital Council does not see it that way. "It's one thing for his constituents to send a little money, and quite another to fly to Tulsa when they get sick," says Phil Goodwin, an administrator at Hillcrest Hospital in Tulsa and vice president of the Council. "The days of cheap air fares are ending, and still they want to build this monument." Goodwin says even the so-called national medical centers such as the Mayo Clinic or the New England Baptist Hospital get most of their patients from very close by. In addition, he notes that a staff investigation by the OHPC found that ORU's projections for out-of-state patients at the City of Faith were grossly unrealistic, in one case being stretched by 2000 percent.

God said, "In the City of Faith on the ORU campus, I want all My healing resources used. Prayer, but more than prayer. Medical science, but more than medical science."

To those who ask why a faith healer would build a hospital, Roberts replies he never did preach against medical science or doctors. "I've been under the care of doctors all my life. I believe that all healing comes from God, regardless of whether the instrument is someone like me or a doctor."

The fact that physicians have cared for Oral all his life was in the past anything but common knowledge. An article in the February 1962 *Harpers* ("Oral Roberts: High Priest of Faith Healing") tells how, at the age of 17 in a back-country revivalist's meeting, Oral was miraculously cured of tuberculosis. Roberts, who today is unavailable to most reporters, went on in 1962 about the details.

"The TB was instantly healed," he recalled. "After an x-ray the doctor said, 'Son, just forget you ever had TB. Your lungs are as sound as a dollar.'"

After announcing the City of Faith in 1977, Roberts began telling a variation of that story, saying on his nationwide TV show that it took more than a year to recuperate. The implication, of course, is that it took both prayer and medicine to heal him—a handy variation considering the medical slant of the City of Faith.

God said, "I want an atmosphere charged with faith and hope, where My healing love fills the entire place."

As Roberts now conceives of health care at the City of Faith, each patient will be assigned a healing team consisting of a physician, a registered nurse, and a prayer partner. He calls it "holistic" health care. Although today Roberts puts the emphasis on the healing power of hope and faith, touts the benefits of modern medicine, and lures people with the language of heavenly healing, in the past he pedaled miraculous cures—period. Some, of course, have doubts even about the cures of the past. Take Vanden Roberts, Oral's older brother who was his right-hand man in the days of the tent crusade. When an interviewer for *60 Minutes* asked Vanden if the people in crusades who got out of wheelchairs were really healed, he replied, "I've seen people that I thought wanted a little attention, and seized upon that moment to get it. You see what I mean?"

God said, "It is in this way you are to build the City of Faith—and to open it DEBT-FREE."

"Debt-free, Lord?"

He said, "Yes! I am concerned about the cost of medical care. I want the best medical care given in the City of Faith, and at a lower cost than the average. I want all kinds of people to be helped. To bring down operating costs, you will have to build and open it debt-free."

It turns out that things will not be quite as inexpensive as God intended. In a deposition before the Oklahoma district court, ORU administrator Winslow, who is slated to head the City of Faith, testified that room charges and average cost per patient are projected to be the same as those in existing hospitals. Despite this adherence to earth-bound economics for the patients, the financing of the City of Faith itself is going exactly according to the heavenly plan. Debt-free. Oral's frequent appeals have resulted in cash, lots of it. Though there have been minor ups and downs in the fund-raising process, most observers feel Roberts will be able to finish the project. "Hell, yes," said one Tulsa businessman.

"He's got millions of little old ladies out there who are going to send him a couple of million dollars, a dollar at a time, for his damned monument." Tulsans especially feel he can pull it off. They have watched Roberts evolve during the past 32 years from a sweaty, Bible-thumping faith healer who pitched his tent wherever he could find a weed-choked lot to a television personality who wears Brioni suits and flies around the country in a \$2-million fan-jet. The man has magnetism, and when he gets on the tube before an audience estimated to range up to 10 million, he gets results.

All of which leads skeptics to ponder the obvious. "Who is going to raise all that money if he suddenly dies?" asked one. At 62, Oral is also concerned about the long-term stability of his empire, and is in the process of grooming a successor. There have been some problems, however. His son Richard, 30, the only one of his four children still in the family business, recently divorced and remarried—a violation of God's law in the eyes of many of Oral's partners. Richard, who once sang in a rock band and is now the titular head of the Oral Roberts Evangelical Association, married on 11 January 1980 an ORU graduate student. The incident caused a stir on campus, where people who leave their partners need permission of the board of regents in order to remarry. Richard did not first get permission, and a closed meeting for faculty and students was eventually called to explain the situation. Richard is not especially shaken by all this. Asked by a reporter from the *Tulsa World* if he will succeed his father, he shrugged and said: "I can only fill my shoes. But I fill them all the way to the toes."

God said, "I have worked through you as my chosen man."

The spouse of the Chosen Man has written an autobiography, *His Darling Wife, Evelyn*, and Richard, who could probably make it as a pop singer, has recorded an album entitled "My Father's Favorite Hymns." The Chosen Man himself has written three autobiographies and more than 50 other books, has produced for more than a decade "Oral Roberts and You" (which is now the largest syndicated TV show in the world), employs 2000 Tulsans in his tight-knit organization, named after himself a university (that now has schools of law, business, nursing, medicine, and dentistry), is on the board of the Bank of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Natural Gas, and the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, drives a Seville and a Mercedes, and is in the process of building a quarter-billion-dollar monument to the medical arts.

Whether the long rise to power and the recent co-option of scientific medicine represents the will of God or the ego of Oral Roberts is a question not a few have pondered. Some observers, leaving aside the metaphysical aspects of the query, see clear historical trends that go something like this. Oral is approaching the golden years, and the closer he gets, the more of the status quo he seems able to stomach. After a couple of dozen years

of fiery-eyed preaching and healing in his "tent cathedral," the Chosen Man took up television, built a university, and switched his religious affiliation from Pentacostal to Methodist. When the laying-on-of-hands became somewhat suspect in religious circles, he began talking of healing as something that could affect your finances, your job, your marriage. Now he has embraced science, in the form of the City of Faith.

BW and Recombinant DNA

The outbreak of anthrax at Sverdlovsk, allegedly because of an explosion at a biological warfare plant, raises a potential question about Soviet adherence to the Biological Weapons Convention of 1975, which forbids the development, production, and stockpiling of biological weapons. The U.S. State Department apparently puts sufficient credence in the reports to have asked the Soviet Union for an explanation of the incident.

What if the arms race in biological warfare should resume? One of the first tools to be considered would doubtless be the recombinant DNA technique, which came to prominence just after the United States and Soviet Union had ratified their failure to produce successful biological warfare agents with conventional techniques by signing the Biological Weapons Convention. The United States, which unilaterally renounced all offensive biological warfare in 1969, continues a modest program of defensive research. "We are not now using recombinant DNA techniques in any of these efforts, partly to keep ourselves out of trouble," says a Defense Department official, who notes that by "trouble" he means public protests.

The potential overlap between academic use of gene splicing and military interests is illustrated by the recent decision of the NIH Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee to permit the cloning of the exotoxin A of *Pseudomonas* under certain conditions. According to the Department of Defense's 1978 report on its chemical and biological warfare program, printed in the *Congressional Record* of 19 July 1979, the bacterial toxins under study included "the botulinum neurotoxins, anthrax toxins, several staphylococcal enterotoxins, enterotoxins produced by cholera and *Shigella* species, diphtheria toxin, and *Pseudomonas* exotoxin A and exoenzyme S."

Despite its presence in such unpleasant company, however, *Pseudomonas* exotoxin is not considered to be very potent. "It was never considered seriously as a biological warfare agent," says Norman Covert, public relations officer at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases, where defensive biological research is conducted. The reason for USAM-RIID's interest in the toxin is as a model to understand the mechanism of toxin action, and because of the danger of *Pseudomonas* infection to individuals who are burned or wounded.

The Biological Weapons Convention prohibits development of biological agents but does not bar research, although it can be seen as posing institutional impediments to an offensive research program. In the United States, the Department of Defense has endorsed the NIH guidelines on recombinant DNA—which require public reporting of experiments—but on one occasion asked to be relieved of the public registration requirement in periods of a national emergency. The request was not acted on and has not been repeated.—NICHOLAS WADE

Addendum. The NIH Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee at its most recent meeting passed a motion with the effect of exempting from its guidelines the cloning of the *Pseudomonas* exotoxin in *Escherichia coli* K-12, as recently noted (*Science*, 28 March). However, after a motion to reconsider, the committee decided instead to permit the experiment under the P1,EK1 conditions of the guidelines.

Be it opportunism or the evolution of a sincere Christian ministry, it may be in trouble. An injunction would shut down the City of Faith hospital even after it was completed. And for the wider ministry of the Chosen Man, the rise to world-

ly power and the storm surrounding the City of Faith may have already shaken his empire more than the closing of a building ever could. It is, after all, the partners and the potential partners who send in the cash. "I don't understand

what he's doing these days," says a woman who has followed Roberts' ministry for many years. "All that show business on his television program and now that hospital. I just hope he's right with God."—WILLIAM J. BROAD

Science Projects Face Cuts, Cancellations

Both Congress and Carter are under heavy pressure to cut the federal budget for science

The metamorphosis of the budget for next year's scientific research and development is taking an unusual turn this year, in part because of the 20 percent inflation rate and the approaching federal election. Congress, acting in concert with the Carter Administration, is planning to knock out the inflation-proof increases in R & D and basic research funds promised only 2 months ago.

Recently, Carter proposed reductions in his earlier estimates; these reductions will severely restrict the budgets of all but two science agencies and will undo many of the gains achieved last year. Between rescissions in the present year and reductions in the next, science programs will lose \$1.4 billion for R & D, and \$210 million in basic research alone. R & D next year will increase only 0.5 percent beyond this year's estimated rate of inflation, while the purchasing power of basic research funds will actually decline by 2.3 percent.

Confirming an oft-stated concern of the scientific community, basic research suffered proportionately more than general R & D in the budget-cutting exercise (declining 3.8 percent as opposed to

2.9 percent). The National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) experienced the sharpest proportional declines, as well as cancellations and deferrals of major programs. NSF, for example, lost \$64 million (a drop of 6.5 percent, leaving a 10.5 percent increase), which will forestall its plans to upgrade academic research facilities, its proposed funding for a mathematical research institute, half of its Soviet-U.S. science exchange funding, and its entire 25-meter telescope project to search for atmospheric amino acids. NASA lost \$219 million, mostly in space science and applications, and will delay its solar polar mission for 2 years (until 1985), its earth radiation experiment for 1 year, and its early Spacelab experiments for 2 years.

Only two agencies will experience real growth in their 1981 research budgets under Carter's proposal: the Department of Defense and NSF. The budget of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will decline by 6.9 percent in purchasing power. Recently the Administration imposed cuts in 1981 construction money

for the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the National Eye Institute, overall intramural research, research resources, support for four new research centers, and training grants. These cuts were made in lieu of reducing the funds necessary for maintenance of the institutes' new stabilized grant system.

In general, Administration officials say those programs initially slated for large increases were the most vulnerable to reductions in the feverish atmosphere of the last few weeks—a new twist on the Administration's much-vaunted zero-base budgeting techniques. For example, the National Cancer Institute's program to test suspect chemical carcinogens proved easy picking for the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), merely because it was slated for an infusion of \$23 million. For similar reasons, OMB took a hefty chunk out of the Department of Defense's laser weapons program, NSF's ocean margins drilling program, the Department of Energy's (DOE) coal gasification program, and the Department of Transportation's cooperative program of automobile research. In this manner, interest groups who fought for these new initiatives had their hard-won gains almost arbitrarily knocked out or reduced.

The space science community apparently put up such a fuss while the Administration was deliberating that the agency was spared more drastic cuts; its agricultural and oceanic satellite systems, the Galileo Jupiter orbiter, the space telescope, and the new gamma-ray observatory project all emerged unscathed after the White House received telephone calls, telegrams, and letters from space scientists. Frank Press, the White House science adviser, insists "The earlier scare stories [about NASA] just were not the case," although they generated much outside interest. One reason for worry was that the funding for the space shuttle



Members of the House budget committee announced their cuts last month.

AP Photo