

Oral Roberts after your \$\$\$

By MARK MCGOVERN

In two recent television broadcasts aired on January 4th and 11th, evangelist Oral Roberts told viewers that if his ministry does not receive \$4.5 million U.S. by March he will die.

Mr. Roberts said on the broadcasts, entitled Expect a Miracle, that God ordered him last March to raise \$8 million U.S. for scholarships at Oral Roberts University medical school in Tulsa, Oklahoma. According to Roberts, God told him "If you don't do it, I'm going to call you home in one year."

The 68 year old evangelist has raised \$3.5 million thus far, but he is still \$4.5 million short in achieving his goal.

This latest of a series of controversial fund-raising tactics by Mr. Roberts may possibly have its roots in a number of financial problems which have plagued him over the past several years.

His ministry, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary

this year, is facing declining revenues due to the aging of his followers and intense competition from other evangelists vying for the coveted religious dollar. Officials told the New York Times that between 1980-1985, Mr. Roberts' ministry had suffered approximately a \$30 million drop in revenue.

Similarly, his television ratings have been steadily slipping in recent years. According to Arbitron Ratings, viewership of his weekly television show has dipped from 2.1 million in 1979 to 1.2 million in 1986; thus dropping him from first to third spot in the ratings for religious shows.

Even the impressive 10 storey City of Faith Medical Clinic at Oral Roberts University has come under a cloud of controversy. According to Mr. Roberts, while on a trip through the California desert in 1977, God told him to build the medical complex. Today, the newly finished building is operating at less than half of its capacity, and is in danger of



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becoming an extremely expensive white elephant.

Likewise, in 1986 the university closed its dental school, and its law school was

transferred to CBN University in Virginia, which was founded by evangelist Pat Robertson.

Mr. Roberts' organization is

far from collapsing however; its annual revenue is close to \$60 million and his weekly program still appears in more than 200 U.S. cities. But one Washington television station, WUSA-TV, has refused to carry the Expect a Miracle broadcasts, while stations in Dallas and Oklahoma are considering similar action. David Lane, president and general

manager of WFAA-TV in Dallas, is strongly considering such action, calling Roberts' latest plea "the lowest form of emotional appeal".

Some interpret Mr. Roberts latest fund-raising effort as a desperate last-ditch effort to pump new life into his slowly eroding ministry. Dr. David E. Harrell Jr., a University Alabama historian who recently wrote a biography of Oral Roberts, believes that the evangelist's recent problems are a sign that his religious empire has reached its peak, and that its apex may possibly mark the end of an era in American religion.



in Deadlock

VIA Rail Canada announced the break off of negotiations yesterday with the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers.

The main issues on the Brotherhood side deal with employment security, work rules, wages and fringe benefits. Management is seeking

wage concessions, greater use of part-time employees and various work rule changes. As well, VIA seeks to increase its ability to provide bilingual services by making bilingualism a requirement in certain jobs.

The parties are applying to the federal minister of labour to assist them in resolving the dispute.

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