

THE HISTORY OF GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AT ORAL ROBERTS UNIVERSITY¹

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Abstract

This article traces the history of graduate theological education at Oral Roberts University from its initial inception in 1963 up until 2018 when a significant transition occurred. Special attention is given to the rebirth of the seminary in 1976 under the leadership of Jimmy Buskirk and the following seasons of its evolution under subsequent deans. From a seminary approved by the United Methodist Church to train candidates for ministry in that denomination to one reflecting a primarily Pentecostal ethos to its current role of serving the Spirit-empowered Movement, the Graduate School of Theology and Ministry (GSTM) has maintained ecumenical diversity within the common bond of the Spirit. This article highlights some of the key figures and issues that have shaped this developmental process.

Introduction

As the oldest Pentecostal/Charismatic seminary in the world, the Graduate School of Theology and Ministry (GSTM) of Oral Roberts University (ORU) has enjoyed a unique history of service to the global historic Christian church. Some four hundred students come annually from myriad national, ethnic, and denominational backgrounds to train to “go into every person’s world,” as founder Oral Roberts would term it, with the message of God’s saving and healing love.

It is difficult to imagine that such a school could have emerged out of the cultural and spiritual tumult in the United States of the 1960s and 1970s. No one could have anticipated a national spiritual awakening, the wave of which the seminary and the university at its center would ride to national prominence and international impact. As

¹ Larry Hart wrote the original version in 2015 for the golden jubilee of the university and Bill Buker updated the study by adding the last section, “The Mathew Era.”—Editor.

the twenty-first century unfolds, the GSTM stands poised once again for global impact in an ever-changing world.

But, as was true of the ministry that gave birth to the seminary, beginnings were humble and sometimes halting. Perhaps no one initially conceived the significant contribution to the church's worldwide mission, which the school would ultimately provide. It all began with a call . . .

The Call

In July of 1935, the state of Oklahoma had only recently begun to recover from the devastating Dust Bowl years, and most citizens endured a hardscrabble existence in what had been, until only relatively recently, Indian Territory. Oral Roberts himself was quite proud of his Native American heritage through his mother. Dying of tuberculosis, young Oral was being driven to a tent revival in Ada, Oklahoma, in hopes of a supernatural deliverance from this debilitating and often fatal disease. As he lay prone on the back seat of the automobile, Oral Roberts received the call to ministry, which would generate decades later a university and seminary of global significance. His own report is one of hearing a divine calling: "Son, I am going to heal you and you are to take the message of my healing power to your generation."² Roberts believed in a God who still speaks today. His last autobiography stated this tenet forthrightly:

If there's a major conviction in my life that sums up how I've accomplished what I have, it is this: God speaks to those who will listen, and when we hear and obey His voice, He in effect becomes the Head Partner with us in the endeavor. I have also discovered that when someone believes that God does speak to people, and then makes a decision not only to listen but also to obey His voice, some type of divine calling inevitably comes with that commitment.³

The story of his healing and subsequent worldwide ministry is legendary now, and the divine directives he was given became formative of the university he founded. "Son, I am going to heal you and you are to take My healing power to your generation. You are to build Me a university and build it on My authority and the Holy Spirit." Quite a lot for a seventeen-year-old boy, newly converted, to fathom! But more specific divine communication in relation to the university itself would follow, some twenty-five years later, in June of 1960: "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. To go even to the uttermost bounds of the earth. Their work will exceed yours, and in this I am well

² Oral Roberts, *The Call: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 34.

³ Oral Roberts, *Expect a Miracle: My Life and Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), v.

pleased.”⁴ These programmatic statements would guide the birth and growth of Oral Roberts University down to the present day. Thus, when it came time to launch the university, it became clear to all involved in the ministry that ORU was an *extension* of Oral Roberts’ calling as a healing evangelist. It was a ministry with a university—surely a unique phenomenon in the twentieth-century American educational scene!

A Developing Dream

Even though God’s instructions were clear and categorical, the dream needed to develop more fully in the mind of Oral Roberts. At first, between 1958 and 1960, Roberts spoke more in terms of a Bible school for international students. By 1961, the vision was more concretely depicted as a “boot camp” for brief training of evangelists from across the globe. He conceived of “little cottages” or “little log cabins,” where this training would occur. By 1962, construction had begun on three buildings to house the “Oral Roberts University of Evangelism,” which was designed to train some 1,000 national and international ministers and workers in healing evangelism. But even before these buildings were completed, Roberts had decided that the dream necessitated even further expansion. Oral Roberts University was to be a strong, academically accredited institution of higher learning for the whole body of Christ. In March of 1962, Roberts invited longtime friend R. O. Corvin to be the academic head of the university.⁵

When the university’s doors were opened in 1965, Oral Roberts delivered a historic address to the first class on September 7, 1965. In his masterful presentation of the vision of a whole person education, Roberts also included an important announcement:

At this point, I would like to say something about the first graduate school of the University, the Seminary. . . . Ministers and other professional Christian workers will be trained for service in many different denominations and other service areas throughout the world. The Dean of the Seminary is my esteemed colleague and lifelong friend, Dr. R. O. Corvin, one of the world’s foremost authorities on the life of Christ and a leader in the field of higher education. We are honored to have Dean Corvin to head the Department of Religion and Philosophy in the undergraduate division of the University.⁶

Roberts had first announced the addition of a theological seminary to the liberal arts program in January 1963. Thus, from the very outset, graduate theological

⁴ Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 32, 162.

⁵ David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 207–11.

⁶ Oral Roberts, “Quest for the Whole Man,” An Address to the First Class at ORU (September 7, 1965).

education—a seminary—was considered integral to the overarching vision of the university. Oral Roberts would say repeatedly through the years, “As the seminary goes, so goes the university.” Unfortunately, the dream of graduate theological education appeared to be short-lived, when Roberts and Corvin reached an impasse early on regarding the precise course charted for the seminary.

Corvin set about building a more narrowly conceived classical Pentecostal graduate school in the Pentecostal Holiness tradition in which both he and Roberts had been reared. Roberts, however, conceived both the university and the seminary as established by God to serve the historic Christian church, the whole body of Christ. On March 19, 1968, it was announced that Corvin had been asked to step down as the dean of the seminary, and the February 1969 meeting of the university’s Board of Regents decided to close the seminary and integrate its faculty back into the undergraduate department of theology.⁷ Thus, the dream for graduate theological education would lie dormant for some eight years until another theological leader would step on the scene, James B. Buskirk.

The *Oral Roberts University Bulletin* of June 1969 stated forcefully the founder’s ecumenical vision for the university:

ORU exists to serve the whole body of Christ, worldwide. It is not concerned with changing the church allegiance of its students; rather, it seeks to bring each student into a more personal, vital relationship with Christ, to acquaint him more fully with the charismatic power of the Holy Spirit, to give him a clearer understanding of the principles of Christian living and to send him back to his own church as a committed witness of the Lord.⁸

Jimmy Buskirk, as most would call him, embodied in his own person and ministry this vision. A United Methodist pastor, educator, and evangelist—fully credentialed both denominationally and educationally—with his own healing testimony and charismatic experience, Buskirk became the founding dean of the new School of Graduate Theology that exists to this day.

The Buskirk Years

Oral Roberts seemed to have a knack for spotting and recruiting excellent leaders to head up the multifaceted enterprise of the university. He was able to persuade John D. Messick to help lay the academic groundwork for the fledgling university, establishing a tradition of excellence from the outset. Messick served from July 1963 to February

⁷ Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 234–38.

⁸ *Oral Roberts University Bulletin*, June 1969, 109, cited in Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 218.

1968, holding various titles of Provost and Dean of Instruction to Executive Vice President. The university would later name the Learning Resources Center (the academic hub of the campus, largely designed by Messick) the John D. Messick Learning Resources Center. But the leader to follow Messick would perhaps provide the greatest impetus toward academic success and excellence, a legacy that would continue for decades. David Edwin Harrell, Jr., author of the definitive biography of Oral Roberts, expressed it best: “The appointment of Carl Hamilton as Messick’s successor was one of the most fortuitous choices Oral Roberts ever made.”⁹

Hamilton’s leadership was crucial to ORU’s competitiveness in the academic marketplace. The added bonus of his being selected for this key post was his vision for theological education. Hamilton would become one of the greatest champions for the seminary’s future development of a PhD program. When the doors of the seminary were opened afresh in the fall of 1976, Jimmy Buskirk would find in Hamilton one of his greatest advocates in the quest for a world-class, Spirit-empowered, ecumenical seminary. The triumvirate of Roberts, Hamilton, and Buskirk collaborated to produce a graduate school of theology without parallel in the world of theological education. The process began with a preaching event on the campus.

Bob Stamps would become a virtual institution on the campus of ORU, serving some thirteen years as chaplain of the university. He had invited Buskirk to preach revival services in 1974. At the end of one of those services, Oral Roberts himself came forward, deeply moved to personal repentance. It began a two-year courtship in which Roberts pursued Buskirk to be the founding dean of his new seminary. Finally, in April 1976, Buskirk accepted the offer, and a new Graduate School of Theology began to take shape. Buskirk’s moving testimony of being healed of chorioretinitis, along with his rich ministry experience and expansive vision of the promise of innovative theological education, won the affections of Oral Roberts:

[Jimmy Buskirk] is one of the few men I have found on earth that I thought God had given the great thoughts that He has given me . . . I have unlimited confidence in this man. His message touches my life, my heart, my head, my wife, my family, and everything around me.¹⁰

The following eight years, from 1976 to 1984, would prove to be the most promising yet tumultuous years of the university. Four more graduate schools would be established: dental, medical, law, and education. Only two would survive: theology and education. The dental and medical schools were closed, and the law school was given to Pat Robertson’s Regent University. It was difficult for some, both within the university

⁹ Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 233.

¹⁰ Oral Roberts, “Baccalaureate Address, May 1, 1977,” 4, cited in Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 370.

and outside, to understand how the seminary could be both fully ecumenical and vitally evangelical—a Spirit-empowered graduate school welcoming the best of international scholarly opinion. But Oral Roberts was confident that students could both “get their learning and keep their burning.” He refused to bifurcate head and heart, to compromise either academic excellence or spiritual vitality.

Buskirk’s first task then was to recruit a world-class faculty as well as to attract students from across the globe. Half of the faculty and up to one-half of the student body initially were United Methodist. But Oral Roberts was not troubled by this, having joined the United Methodist Church himself. Perhaps this imbalance was necessary at the outset to maintain the seminary’s ecumenical flavor. The school would evolve to much greater denominational (and nondenominational) diversity in the years to follow. Of utmost importance, it would continue to have a vital charismatic ethos, in harmony with the ministry of Oral Roberts.

The beginning years were modest but enthusiastic. Doors were opened to ORU’s first graduate theology students in the fall of 1976, adding their numbers to “an already strong and committed group of undergraduate students and faculty in the Theology Department.”¹¹ The four founding faculty members were as follows:

James B. Buskirk, Dean of the School of Theology and Professor of Evangelism;

James A. Hewitt, Assistant Professor in Biblical Literature (New Testament);

Theodore M. Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology; and

Kenneth R. Jones, Associate Professor of Church and Society and Director of Ministry Reflection.

By the fall semester of 1976, thirty-eight students were enrolled in the MA Theology program (42 percent of whom were ORU graduates), and thirty-nine students entered the MDiv program (33 percent of whom were ORU graduates). Immediately, the wheels were set in motion to acquire full accreditation with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the official accreditation agency for theology schools in the United States and Canada. Initial correspondence, the hosting on campus of ATS associate director, Marvin Taylor, the implementation of required study and planning procedures, and attendance of the Thirtieth Biennial Meeting of the ATS in Boston (June 1976) were put into effect. And Buskirk submitted the first of his “My Dream” statements, characterizing the purposes and future of the seminary. “It became apparent that the dreams of the University and the Seminary were one and the same.”¹²

¹¹ “1976 Regents Report,” 12.

¹² “1976 Regents Report,” 13–15.

Hamilton had encouraged the process of “cross-pollination” among the schools and departments of the university, providing enhanced vision and promoting even greater unity. Buskirk furthered this process with his own concrete plans for the seminary. He dreamed of “winsome servants of God,” both lay and clergy, spreading God’s saving and healing love globally. These graduates would be thoroughly grounded in the scriptures, strongly identified with the Christian heritage of the past two millennia, rooted in sound theology, and moving in charismatic power toward the needs of humanity. He adds:

My dream includes the further fruits of cross-pollination. I see mature persons who had the rare privilege at ORU to be associated in depth with students in the other graduate schools and the School of Arts and Sciences. Yet they did not sacrifice academic accountability in their own vocation. The education of the whole person—spirit, mind and body—in such a community of cross-pollination, will have produced persons practicing their vocation as a major expression of their Christian discipleship.¹³

Buskirk further elucidated his dream for the seminary with words, “which I am tempted at this point to call a prophecy,” he adds, that the beginnings of a “Third Great Awakening” seemed to be stirring, bringing the global renewal of the church in the charismatic ministries of both lay and clergy.¹⁴ The seminary was off to a running start!

The following year (1976–77), the seminary began to spread its wings. Ambitious goals were set, envisioning a school of 300 students (250 MDi. and 50 MA Theology) by 1980. The budget for the seminary was separated from that of the Undergraduate Theology Department, and the faculty included professors from both the undergraduate department and the seminary: Paul Chappell, Steve Durasoff, Howard M. Ervin, Charles Farah, Roy Hayden, Jim Hewett, Jerry Horner, Ken Jones, Bill Kuert, Harry Townsend, and Ted Williams. That fall semester, the first class of MDiv students came on board. The relationship between the undergraduate department and the seminary remained strong through an intentional policy of shared faculties.

The 1977–78 year of the seminary could be called the “Year of Community,” as graduate housing was established under the supervision of Mildred Lacour. The full faculty of the seminary began to take definitive shape with the following professors:

James B. Buskirk, Vice Provost of Theology and Spiritual Affairs and Dean of the School of Theology;

¹³ “1976 Regents Report,” 15.

¹⁴ “1976 Regents Report,” 15.

Ken Jones, Associate Dean, Associate Professor of Church and Society, and Director of Field Education;

James A. Hewett, Assistant Professor in New Testament Literature and Languages;

Theodore M. Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology;

Burrell O. Dinkins, Associate Professor of Pastoral Care;

J. Steven O'Malley, Assistant Professor of Church History;

John M. Miller, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Missions;

Lawrence Lacour, Adjunct Professor of Preaching;

Howard M. Ervin, Professor of Old Testament Literature and Languages;

M. Robert Mansfield, Associate Professor of New Testament and Languages;

J. Michael Miller, Jr., Associate Professor of Old Testament Literature and Languages; and

Lawrence J. Losoncy, Adjunct Associate Professor of Christian Education.

Looking ahead, the School of Theology envisioned further faculty additions and new strategies for staffing healing teams as sent out from the university and Oral Roberts Ministries. It also was dreaming of offering the PhD, a goal that would ultimately elude the school for years to come because of ongoing changes in the total university and ministry and financial challenges.

The following year, Oon Chor Khoo was added as a theological librarian, and a self-study for ATS accreditation was initiated. Typical of Oral Roberts' endeavors in general, goals for the seminary were being met and exceeded, and the overall ethos of the school was one of hope and excitement. Four years were now being completed in the life of the fledgling School of Theology, with a corresponding descriptive term: Beginning, Growth, Community, and Accreditation.¹⁵

In the fall 1979 Regents Report, a historical summary and an announcement of two additional faculty members were included. In simplest terms, the School of Theology was depicted as follows:

Graduate study of theology at ORU has the intention of enabling theology and practice of ministry to accrue out of a critical and devotional understanding of the

¹⁵ "Exit Report for the Academic Year 1978–1979."

Scriptures. The Master of Arts in Theology prepares persons for teaching in churches and colleges. The Master of Divinity prepares persons for professional ministry.¹⁶

Robert Tuttle (evangelism) and Larry Hart (systematic theology) were the two new faculty members added to the School of Theology, and a note was made to the regents of the progress in library resources as well as the new theology librarian, Oon Chor Khoo. But one of the most important events in the seminary's history was to take place during the summer of 1980.

On June 18, 1980, at the biennial meeting of the Association of Theological Schools, the membership approved by vote the addition of the Oral Roberts University School of Theology to its list of accredited institutions in the association. A July 1, 1980, letter from ATS director Marvin J. Taylor congratulated Jim Buskirk and Carl Hamilton for this achievement.¹⁷ This was truly a milestone in the seminary's history. Now, graduates could fully utilize their degrees for entrance into any of the finest schools across the globe for further graduate work. In addition, it signified that the School of Theology had attained and would endeavor to maintain a level of excellence in graduate theological education and professional preparation for ministry second to none. Oral Roberts himself would have expected nothing less! The sign on his desk read, "Make No Little Plans Here." Like the university at large, the seminary's vision was global in scope, yet also focused on going *into every individual person's world*.

After five years of rapid development, the seminary was hitting full stride. May 1981 saw the largest graduating class thus far of fifty-five graduates. The 1981–82 year saw the following important developments:

- 1) Addition of the first full-time woman professor;
- 2) Development of first class in Koinonia ministry;
- 3) Addition of the first cross-cultural field education class to enable international students to assimilate their education into their native cultural settings;
- 4) Establishment of the first missionary internship;
- 5) Granted official approval by the University Senate of the United Methodist Church to train candidates for ministry in that denomination;
- 6) Inauguration of the Doctor of Ministry program with eleven students participating in the first seminar; and

¹⁶ "Board of Regents Report," October 5, 1979.

¹⁷ Letter, July 1, 1980, from Marvin J. Taylor to Dr. James Buskirk.

- 7) Holy Spirit conference offered as continuing education with a national audience of over 1,200 participants.

The ideal design for the School of Theology from the very outset was a student body of 400 students: 250 Master of Divinity students; 50 Master of Arts students; and 100 PhD and DMin students. The total for this particular year was 229 students (202 masters students and twenty-seven DMin students).¹⁸

Buskirk also oversaw spiritual life at ORU in his role as Vice Provost for Theology and Spiritual Affairs. For thirteen years, Robert Stamps had served as chaplain of the university, overseeing the entire spiritual life program. His successor was Larry Hart of the seminary, who served as chaplain of the university from 1981 to 1984 under Buskirk and, of course, Oral Roberts himself, who always took a strong interest in university chapels and the overall spiritual life of the university. Chapels, held twice a week, were considered high priority, plenary events for all students, faculty, and administrators. International speakers from around the world came to campus to speak in these chapels from time to time, as well as Oral Roberts himself. Often from the chapel platform, Roberts would mention the key role of the School of Theology, saying: “As the seminary goes, so goes the university.” It was a strong affirmation as well as a sober challenge to keep the seminary on course.

With full accreditation and a full and functioning top-tier faculty, the seminary was poised for decades of progress and impact. Buskirk’s years at the helm would witness growth on every level: student enrollment, a developing curriculum, and the blossoming of a God-given vision to send fully educated and empowered ministers to the farthest reaches of the globe. Rooted in a university that was also fulfilling this God-given vision, the seminary emerged as a key theological training center for the burgeoning worldwide Spirit-empowered Movement that would become the leading edge of global Christianity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. At the same time, during Buskirk’s years as dean, the seminary also continued to serve substantially *denominational Christianity* in all its diversity.

The seminary’s strongest ties in this regard were initially, of course, with the United Methodist Church, with whom both Roberts and Buskirk were credentialed. Unfortunately, this denomination would ultimately withdraw approval of the seminary for the training of United Methodist ministers. Some would have attributed it to the strong competition the budding seminary presented to existing United Methodist schools. Students from the classical Pentecostal denominations joined ranks with independent Charismatics, Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Catholics, Orthodox, and the like to form a diverse and thriving student body. Oral Roberts’ vision to serve the whole body of

¹⁸ “Annual Report 1981–82 for Board of Regents.”

Christ was coming to fruition. Yet, while these foundational academic and spiritual structures had been firmly established, a storm was on the horizon, threatening to sink both the university and the seminary.

Turbulent Transitions

The early 1980s were tumultuous years for both Oral Roberts personally and for the university. The Roberts family had endured tearing tragedies. At the same time, Roberts had embarked on one of the largest projects of his life in the building of the City of Faith hospital and its accompanying medical school. Massive financial challenges threatened to swallow the university's fiscal resources, and Roberts' public statements on the needs he faced generated national controversy. Ministry income began to drop precipitously. The seminary itself would, of course, suffer from these developments. But the dangers were even greater than anticipated.

Both the university and the seminary were shaken by the departures of Carl Hamilton and Jimmy Buskirk. Eleven United Methodist faculty would also exit the seminary. Needless to say, the school's accreditation—indeed, its very existence—was in jeopardy. But similar to its founder, Oral Roberts himself, the School of Theology found a way to bounce back from temporary probation in terms of ATS accreditation and a more permanent drop in funds. It eventually continued to flourish as one of the few growing seminaries on the North American continent.

The general makeup of the school would change to a more prominently Pentecostal/Charismatic constituency both within the faculty and the student body. And numerical growth, miraculously, would continue unabated. Academic dean Paul G. Chappell, reporting on behalf of dean Larry Lea, would relate the following to William Jernigan, Vice-President for University Affairs:

In 1984–85, the Lord performed major surgery on the ORU Seminary, but he certainly did not intend for this patient to die; He intended for her to have abundant life. Since that date, the Seminary has grown from one record enrollment to another. With its clear identity as a Charismatic Bible-believing/teaching institution and with a Charismatic faculty, we have grown to become the 34th largest Seminary in North America. We are the fastest-growing Seminary in North America, growing this year [1986–87] at a 17 percent rate, while other schools in the nation are suffering a 1.2 percent decline, and in the Southwest, seminaries have suffered a 4 percent decrease.¹⁹

The seminary's student population was now up to approximately 440—astounding, given the tumult of the times! But despite the spiritual maelstrom occurring

¹⁹ "Dean's Report," November 1, 1987.

both in Tulsa at ORU and on the national scene, with controversies and scandals abounding, the operative word for the seminary was *growth*.

Oral Roberts had latched onto another spiritual leader to take the helm of the seminary: Larry Lea. Lea, a former Southern Baptist, was witnessing an astounding revival in his newly established independent Charismatic church in Rockwall, Texas, Church on the Rock, a church of some 7,000 members, which was also spawning additional churches across the country. Lea himself was leading a prayer movement for revival, bringing encouragement and inspiration to many in the beleaguered Charismatic Movement at the time. The seminary's identity as a distinctly Pentecostal/Charismatic, interdenominational school rooted strongly in "the healing ministry of President Roberts and the local church/prayer ministry of Dean Lea" was further consolidated.²⁰

In his final Regents' Report before his departure in 1988, Lea would characterize the seminary's complexion in distinctive terms. He described the ORU School of Theology and Missions as a multi-denominational seminary, seeking "to prepare students for ministry within their own particular tradition, church, and culture." Embracing a diversity of theological traditions while maintaining an intentional evangelical theological perspective, the seminary sought "to introduce students to the ongoing ecumenical dialogue concerning the nature of the Church." Four words were used to portray the seminary's distinctive philosophy:

- 1) *Evangelical*: affirming full biblical authority and the primacy of evangelism;
- 2) *Catholic*: embracing the worldwide Body of Christ;
- 3) *Reformed*: acknowledging the need to be open to change or reform, but always in the light of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience; and
- 4) *Charismatic*: participating in the larger gathered Christian community and flowing in the charismatic empowerment of the Spirit.

The seminary was also depicted as an extension of the ministry of Oral Roberts, taking the gospel of God's saving/healing love to the ends of the earth.²¹ During this period, the seminary's name was changed to the ORU Graduate School of Theology and Missions.

²⁰ "1988 Regents' Report."

²¹ "1988 Regents' Report."

The Chappell Years

Paul G. Chappell, who had served well as the seminary's academic dean for many years, became the school's new dean in 1988. Continuing to flourish despite financial challenges, the seminary would establish two new exciting outposts for the spread of charismatic theological education: an extension was initiated in Jack Hayford's Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California; and the school also committed itself to assisting the development of a seminary for the Foursquare Gospel International Church in Korea. Later, these schools would be known as The King's Seminary and Asia Life University, respectively. Professors were sent to these sites to teach modular courses, and the seminary aided in the ongoing theological enterprise at these sites.²²

Despite continuing financial challenges, Chappell could report to the ORU regents at the end of the 1990–91 school year that “there is a strong and unifying sense of purpose and mission permeating the School of Theology and Missions,” and that the seminary was “preparing Spirit-empowered, professionally equipped ministers and Christian leaders who will make a difference in their world today and in the 21st century.”²³ The seminary was by far the largest professional school in the university, with 511 students.²⁴ This “Signs and Wonders Seminary” was now the twenty-fourth largest accredited seminary in North America. Financial challenges notwithstanding, the seminary continued to develop new programs and dream new dreams.²⁵

The eight years in which Paul Chappell served as dean of the School of Theology and Missions were nothing short of miraculous. The school moved from the brink of collapse to the very top tier of theological education in North America. At the time, the seminary was the only fully accredited Pentecostal/Charismatic seminary in the United States and Canada. It served well the worldwide revival movement of which it was a part. Then, the seminary would see another brief period of transition.

In May of 1996, Chappell resigned as dean, and Jerry Horner, professor and former chair of ORU's Undergraduate Department of Theology, was named the new dean. Thomson Mathew was appointed Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. Horner had previously served as the founding dean of the School of Divinity of Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia. New commitments were made to the founding vision and to continued accreditation. In 1996, student enrollment was at 551 students: 55 percent male and 45 percent female; 43 percent Caucasian; 35 percent African American; 4 percent Hispanic; and 18 percent Asian, American Indian, and other

²² “Regents’ Report 1989–90,” 45–46.

²³ “Regents’ Report 1990–91,” 2.

²⁴ “Regents’ Report 1990–91,” 3.

²⁵ “Regents Report 1990–91,” 3ff.

groups. The student body represented thirty-seven denominations, thirty-one states, and thirteen foreign countries.²⁶ By 1999, the seminary had twenty-two full-time faculty, all with earned doctorates, and was dreaming new dreams, having received renewed accreditation the previous academic year. The oldest and largest Pentecostal/Charismatic seminary in the world was poised for a whole new chapter.

The Mathew Years

On January 1, 2000, Thomson Mathew was appointed the new dean of the seminary, launching the school into more than a decade and a half of growth and maturation. Yale graduate and third-generation Pentecostal preacher from India, Mathew had served as a prayer partner at the City of Faith, praying for the first patient to enter the hospital and the last patient, when the hospital was closed. Moving across the street to the university, he had served well in numerous administrative and teaching roles, which prepared him well for his new leadership role at the helm of the seminary.

Mathew proved to be the perfect choice for the new chapter into which the seminary was entering. He hit the ground running, promoting new initiatives such as the DMin Fast Track program, which enabled pastors and ministry staff of Charismatic megachurches and leaders of large national and global ministries to obtain further theological education. ORU President Richard Roberts himself was an early enrollee! A similar program at the Master of Arts level was also implemented.²⁷

The School of Theology and Missions was entering into mature years of rich degree offerings and vast vision. It was self-described as a “Signs and Wonders seminary that promotes academics, healing evangelism, and spiritual empowerment.” The seminary offered the following degrees:

Doctor of Ministry Master of Divinity;

MA in Biblical Literature;

MA in Biblical Literature with Advanced Languages Concentration;

MA in Historical/Theological Studies;

MA in Christian Counseling;

MA in Christian Counseling with Marriage and Family Therapy Concentration;

MA in Christian Education;

²⁶ “Regents’ Report 1996–97,” 97.

²⁷ “Regents’ Report,” November 1, 2000, 69.

MA in Missions; and

MA in Practical Theology.²⁸

Reflecting his forward-looking orientation, Mathew established a new committee, “The 21st Century Committee”—composed of 50 percent faculty and 50 percent pastors (male, female, and minorities)—to describe what the product of the seminary should look like “in order to address the changing needs of the churches.” This committee did extensive research and held numerous conversations with church leaders to explore these issues.²⁹ Working in consultation with president Richard Roberts and provost Ralph Fagin, the committee also proposed changes in the Seminary’s curriculum and procedures in order to address perceived ecclesial and societal needs.³⁰

The 21st Century Committee formed five task forces: curriculum development, technology, delivery systems, resources, and faculty development. It held focus groups with current students and developed an overall design for learning. Some of the pressing issues discovered were as follows:

- Increasing ethnic and religious diversity;
- An aging population in North America;
- Increasing idealism and religious fervor among young adults globally;
- Expanding technology;
- The need to relate the church more directly to the community;
- The high-stress nature of Christian ministry; and
- The need for ministerial training in developing nations.

The committee also helped establish core values that would guide the process of curriculum evaluation in terms of the engendering of core competencies.³¹

Another ministry, based out of the seminary, was the Ministry Training and Development Institute (MTDI). Teachers included Richard and Lindsay Roberts, Billy Joe and Sharon Daugherty, LaDonna Osborn, Keith Butler, Myles Munroe, Bob Yandian, and numerous others. Mathew and other seminary faculty members taught as well. Certificates were awarded at various levels of training. The seminary revisited and clarified her mission and purpose statements as well.

Times of transition and new beginnings demand embracing anew the founding vision of an institution and further elucidation of her mission and purpose. Thus, the

²⁸ “Regents’ Report,” November 1, 2001, 87.

²⁹ “Regents’ Report,” November 1, 2001, 90.

³⁰ “Regents’ Report,” November 1, 2001, 71.

³¹ “Regents’ Report,” November 1, 2001, 59.

seminary's administration and faculty worked together to generate formal statements as follows:

MISSION STATEMENT:

Oral Roberts University School of Theology and Missions provides graduate professional theological education for the equipping and training of men and women empowered by the Holy Spirit for effective leadership in the Christian church, ministries, and society.

PURPOSE STATEMENT:

The ORU School of Theology and Missions, an extension of the Oral Roberts and Richard Roberts ministries, seeks to prepare students for competent and Spirit-led Christian ministry. The Seminary is called to develop men and women who know the Bible, who have a deep compassion for people, and who, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, can revitalize the church, evangelize the world, and heal the nations. Professional theological education at this Seminary will integrate Biblical and theological training with practical skills. This integration will take place in a charismatic/Pentecostal ethos where the gifts of the Spirit are manifested and spiritual formation is nurtured.

The Seminary seeks to develop leaders who can communicate the message of the gospel to those in need of a Savior, and God's healing power to the world's suffering. The goal of the school for its graduates is to carry this vital message of redemption, holiness, and healing to those places where God's light is seen dim, where His voice is heard small, where His power is not known.

New planning in terms of objectives and competencies, curriculum, and needs assessments was initiated to follow through with this vision.³² Student competencies included (1) Spirit-filled living, (2) academic excellence, (3) professional competence, and (4) cultural relevance.³³ Shortly thereafter, an ePortfolio version of the seminary's assessment program was established under the directorship of Lillian Breckenridge, enabling a more thorough appraisal of learning outcomes and program efficiency.³⁴

The year 2010 saw the birth of Empowered 21, an arm of global outreach and enrichment for the university and seminary. Mathew served on the cabinet of this massive new undertaking, and three seminary faculty members participated in scholarly conversations held at ORU, Regent University, and Vanguard University, as well as a combined conversation among leaders, scholars, and new generation leaders held in Dallas. The result was a gathering of some 10,000 participants from across the globe

³² "Regents' Report," December 2003, 60, 61.

³³ "Regents' Report," November 2004, 57.

³⁴ "Regents' Report," November 2006, 77.

and across America at an Empowered 21 convention held on the ORU campus and scholarly publications. This event would mark the beginning of numerous other such outreaches across the globe in the years ahead.³⁵

The academic year 2010–11 would also mark another milestone: the thirty-year anniversary of offering the Doctor of Ministry degree, one of the seminary's most successful programs. Beginning in 1981, the Doctor of Ministry program had graduated 358 students, 131 of whom were from the Korean program. Among these graduates were notable Christian leaders such as Pastor Tom Harrison of Asbury United Methodist Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma, Pastor Billy Joe Daugherty of Victory Christian Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Rev. Mrs. Yonggi Cho of Yoido Full Gospel Church, Seoul, Korea.³⁶ During the following two years, the seminary continued to develop its online delivery system and also assumed ORU's Bible Institute under its aegis, reporting to the trustees as follows:

The ORU Bible Institute is now under the College of Theology and Ministry. Sam Barsoum is the Coordinator of this program under the direct supervision of Dean Tom Mathew and Associate Dean Cheryl Iverson. The two delivery systems are (1) the ORU Bible Institute Online Program, which is designed for Christians who desire intensive training in Biblical studies, theology, and practical ministries, and (2) the ORU Bible Institute Local Church Program, which is designed to complement the educational ministries of the local church for the equipping of the saints for ministry. Both delivery systems offer a General Theological Studies Certificate (19 credit hours) and a Diploma of Theological Studies (33 credit hours).³⁷

The following years witnessed continued growth and maturity in the seminary. Degree programs and course offerings continued to be refined and expanded. Distance education burgeoned with a promise of exponential growth, and ORU moved full force into the online/modular arena. Under Tim Ekblad's leadership, the modular program experienced significant expansion and created new formats through which course content could be efficiently and effectively delivered. From initial requirements of more than thirty visits to campus during the course of degree completion, to only one visit per semester to ultimately no visits at all, the distance versions of the MDiv and MPT degrees became increasingly user-friendly. This foray into distance education would position the GSTM well in responding to future challenges, such as those presented by a global pandemic.

One of the most significant developments during the Mathew years was the growth of the counseling program. From its inception in 1987, as a graduate degree in

³⁵ "Regents' Report," April 2010, 3.

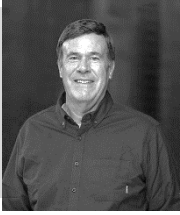
³⁶ "Regents' Report," September 2010, 3.

³⁷ "Regents' Report," January 2013, 6.

Christian Counseling designed to meet state licensure requirements, the program has sought to prepare students to be discerning of the Spirit's activity in the counseling process and to develop an expectation that the Spirit can empower them to bring hope and healing to clients even in clinical and secular contexts. This emphasis on the integration of psychology, theology, and spirituality remains the program's primary distinctive. The name of the program was changed in 2017 from Christian Counseling to Professional Counseling in response to feedback from alumni who were encountering questions from licensure boards about whether the program was sufficiently clinical or just pastoral. The increasing influx of international students also had an influence on the name change, as many were returning to countries hostile to Christianity, so having "Christian Counseling" on their diplomas and transcripts was not helpful. Currently, the Professional Counseling program has become the largest graduate program in the university and offers students options to prepare themselves as Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC), Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT), and Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselors (LADC).

Another significant development during Mathew's leadership was the hiring of ORU's first distinguished professor. Wonsuk Ma joined the seminary faculty in 2016 as the Distinguished Professor of Global Christianity and assumed the responsibility of developing the university's first PhD program. His wife, Julie Ma, also joined the faculty as Associate Professor of Missions and Intercultural Studies. Coming from the United Kingdom, where Wonsuk Ma served as the Executive Director and David Yonggi Cho Research Tutor of Global Christianity at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, he brought the experience and expertise needed to successfully launch a PhD in Theology with ATS approval. With the capable assistance of Eric Newberg, the PhD program took shape, developing its emphasis on contextual theology and attracting attention from scholars around the world. It is with great excitement that we anticipate the meaningful contributions that these doctoral students will make to the body of knowledge in their field.

The Mathew years came to an abrupt end in May of 2016 when the faculty received notice that after sixteen years of distinguished leadership, Mathew had resigned as dean, effective immediately, and would be taking a year's sabbatical, after which he would return to teach. Vinson Synan, the legendary historian of the Pentecostal Movement and former Dean of Regent University's Divinity School, became the interim dean and, with the capable support of Cheryl Iverson, who remained on as associate dean, was instrumental in facilitating the first phase of what would turn out to be a lengthy transition process. Fortunately, the seminary faculty contained many veteran professors whose non-anxious presence provided a stabilizing influence during this time. Eventually, a new leadership team emerged to guide the seminary into the next chapter of its ever-expanding story.



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