

A Seminary Dean's Experiment with Servant Leadership: Stories and Lessons from My Journey through Ivy League to Whole Person Education. By Thomson K. Mathew. Kottayam, Kerala, India: GoodNews Books, 2021. 233 pp.

Thomson Mathew is a South Indian Pentecostal theologian with two doctorates, one in theology and the other in education. After his pastoral ministry in New Haven, Connecticut, he served in various roles at Oral Roberts University (ORU) until his retirement: hospital chaplain, theology professor, and dean of the College of Theology and Ministry (CoTM). He is now the university's professor emeritus.

The book is a memoir framed in the development and exercise of servant leadership. The book has a special value to ORU members. Following the Introduction, the book is divided into three parts: "My Story," "Stories," and "Lessons." The book concludes with a collection of miscellaneous pieces as an appendix. Part one contains four chapters of the author's biography. Chapter one describes his life in India and the rich culture of Kerala, where Christian presence is traced to the apostolic time. Chapter two contains his study at Yale Divinity School, requiring trust in God's provision and cross-cultural adjustments. He describes how his pastoral ministry in New Haven, Connecticut, was challenging because it demanded a different level of cultural negotiations and pastoral leadership. This was his earliest experience of servant leadership and where his life-long passion for servant leadership began. Chapter three opens with his new life in Oklahoma. He served as the first staff chaplain at the newly opened City of Faith, ORU's hospital and medical school. His detailed reflection on his work at the hospital fills a crucial gap in the university's history. The rest of the chapter describes his transition to ORU's Graduate School of Theology and Mission (or "Seminary" in his designation), first as a professor and then as its dean. This lengthy section (twelve pages!) serves as a rare window into the everyday life of the university's theology department, including his various innovation efforts. Chapter four details the seminary's global expansion, which also took him to many countries, engaging with church leaders. As a long-serving member of the university, he worked with four presidents and five provosts (78–80). The chapter ends with his retirement.

The second part (chapters five through eight) follows the same four periods in the first part with a collection of short narratives. The narratives enrich the earlier chapters with his own life experiences and those close to him. To the reviewer, the stories from his City of Faith and ORU eras are relevant and insightful. Concerning the City of Faith, Mathew paints a fuller picture beyond the typical narrative of Oral Roberts' ambitious but failed plan to combine medicine and prayer. Mathew's stories are particularly revealing. He shares Oral Roberts' passion for the hospital's vision and his struggle to maintain this massive operation. The stories of selected patients at the hospital illustrate the life-transforming work of prayer and medicine.

As expected, the stories around the seminary were most relevant to me. They shed important light on the school's ethos, for example, how faculty members were willing to go beyond their duties to nurture their students. Stories of the students are equally rewarding as "ORU goes through them as they go through ORU," as the author often said. Although the stories appear random, the author carefully builds his goal of establishing servant leadership characteristics.

The third part (chapter nine) consolidates Mathew's life journey into a list of twenty servant leadership lessons. The book is like history writing with a clear agenda in mind. I am sure each lesson can utilize one or two stories in the book to illustrate the point. The appendix includes two sermon outlines the author delivered to the university members "at crucial moments" (xxii) and the valedictorian speeches his two daughters delivered to the university as exemplars of the university's whole-person education.

Assessing the book's contribution is tricky partly because I read the book from a specific angle. To begin with, the book accomplished its stated goal: establishing servant leadership lessons using his autobiographical reflection (chapter nine). It would have been more convenient for readers had Mathew categorized the twenty lessons, or more, if we add all the points from "Seven Things I Wish All Leaders Knew" (175–79) and "Ten Life Lessons" (179–80).

The book also fulfilled the assumed goal of a reflective memoir. The reflective history of one's life is always valuable to the author, his family, and close associates. For the university, the book provides valuable information to fill many gaps, particularly on the short life of the City of Faith. I greatly enjoyed reading how the "whole person healing" concept was facilitated in partnership between doctors and chaplains. For the College of Theology and Ministry, the book supplements the only two written histories of its Graduate School of Theology and Ministry: "The Seminary: A History of Graduate Theological Education at Oral Roberts University" by Larry Hart (unpublished, 2013) and a published essay on James Buskirk.¹

The author brings his rich and multifaceted career as a scholar, pastor, chaplain, and administrator to his book. He must have in mind several groups as the readers of the book. With his easy-reading style, the book is a rich mine for different readers to gain insights into his life and message.

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¹ James Shelton, Arden C. Autry, and Sally Jo Shelton, "In Memoriam: Dr. James B. Buskirk (1933–2020)," *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 6:1 (2021), 7–25.