

Memories, Memories—of Crossings, of SemineX

Colleagues,

Tucked into a secluded cyber-folder in my Macintosh I found two items from days gone by. Each one must have been composed for someone, but it is only for the second one that I still remember who that was. I think I still believe what I said then, so I don't hesitate to pass it on to the listserve today. After last week's longish review essay, these two more circumspect items won't take so much of your time.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

Earliest Memories of Crossings

1. The earliest document I know of with the word Crossings in the caption is dated Jan. 6 (Epiphany – it was a Sunday), 1974. It was Bertram's proposal for what some of us might do if JAO Preus, president of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, continued his apparent program of picking off the notorious liberals on the Concordia Seminary faculty and thereby resolving the problem of false doctrine allegedly being taught by that faculty. [Go to www.crossings.org and click on Library, then on Works by Robert W. Bertram, and scroll down to "Crossings, Inc. (Saint Louis): A Proposal."]1a. Prior to all this, of course, was the "new religion curriculum" at Valparaiso University beginning in 1957, brainstormed by Bob Bertram with Bob Schultz (arrived at VU in 1956) and EHS (arrived

in 1957) becoming the curriculum-creating subcommittee. That's spelled out in great detail in Bob's own "History of Crossings" on the website.

1b. And prior to that was Richard R. Caemmerer and the reformation of preaching the gospel in the LCMS in the 1940s and 1950s at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. In my mind the impact of Caemmerer shows in the 6-step sequence for text studies that has become the Crossings tradition. Caemmerer had only three: what is the MALADY pinpointed in this text? what is the text's GOAL? and what is the MEANS BY WHICH to get from malady to goal?

In Crossings' six steps Caemmerer's first step [MALADY] was expanded to three levels of diagnosis (initial, advanced, final) and that expansion to three levels came straight from the understanding of sin portrayed by the Augsburg Confession and its Apology. The MEANS BY WHICH to get to either of Caemmerer's two GOALS for any particular sermon was always the Good News of the crucified and risen Christ. That became Crossings' step 4. And the two types of GOALS in Caemmerer's model – "Lord, increase our faith" and "Lord, increase our love," became steps 5 and 6.

2. Now back to Seminex 1974. Exactly 14 days after that Epiphany 1974 date, almost to the hour, John Tietjen was suspended as president of Concordia Seminary by the Seminary Board. The purpose of that meeting on Epiphany evening had been to brainstorm how those of us on Preus's "villain list" might continue our callings even though we too might have been sacked from the Seminary faculty. That had already been happening with Arlis Ehlen and Paul Goetting, I think, as well as with the "forced retirement" that the Board was proposing for half a dozen senior faculty colleagues who were on the "wrong side" as far as Preus was concerned. Repp, Piepkorn, Caemmerer, Sauer,

Bouman, maybe Wuerffel.

3. Within 24 hours of Tietjen's suspension the student body addressed the Seminary Board, declaring a moratorium on class attendance "until such a time as you designate who the false teachers are that we should no longer listen to." 24 hours after that the faculty joined the students in that decision. So everything changed. It was no more individual villains being selected for sacrifice, but the whole faculty majority (45 folks) who four weeks later were summarily dismissed by the Board for not returning to work under the newly-appointed interim seminary president who was the major voice in the heresy charges against all the rest of us.
4. Thus Seminex was under way, although on that Epiphany weekend nobody was talking like that. And when Seminex then did become the direction for our continuing teaching and continuing learning, the Crossings option was put on the shelf. It didn't fit what the facts now were.
5. In the last couple semesters that Seminex was operating in St. Louis, Bob offered a couple seminars on the Word of God and Daily Work. But I'm not sure whether the word Crossings was used in publicizing what this seminar was going to do.
6. Bob wrote an extended early history of Crossings https://crossings.org/archive/bob/History_of_Crossings.pdf in 1996. As I recall, Bob links Crossings to large sections of his own personal theological development. And that's not inaccurate, though I was a much more public figure of the operation during the 10 years I was executive director, 1983-1993. Bob traces Crossings back to his own graduate studies at the University of Chicago in the late 1940s and his initial years of teaching at Valpo. I was one of his students during those "early years" at Valpo, doing a philosophy

major, and I don't remember the word Crossings used as descriptor for the way we were studying theology, but as he says in his own 1996 narrative, "never ask a 75-year-old professor to reminisce." [D.v., in a few days from today (10/22/09) my number will be 79. "Never ask a 79-year-old . . ."]

The Two Seminexes

Now and then over the years I have referred to "The Two Seminexes." earlier this year I received this inquiry:

"I do wonder about the two Seminex's that you referenced. I don't know that we have a chance to gather soon to hear you speak about that so if you could give me the abridged version of that, I would welcome same."

Here's my response:

Briefly.

One strand of Seminex's heritage and focal point for Seminex community members was the Bible-battle. LCMS prez Preus and old LCMS Biblicism vs. historical-critical method [HCM]. It was about Preus's political takeover and his (bleep) tactics all done under the "smokescreen" (Tietjen's term) of saving the Bible for the faithful in the LCMS. It was about church-leader-tyranny, justice and freedom, as well as a better way to read the Bible, better than the ancient LCMS way of doing so. When the term hermeneutics surfaced it was Biblicist hermeneutics vs. HCM hermeneutics.

Other strand said that it was a fight analogous to Augsburg 1530. Not fundamentally about the Bible, nor primarily (bleep) church-politics (though that was true), but about the Gospel

itself. How to understand –and promote–the Aha! at the center of the Lutheran Confessions. Focal point for this strand (Bertram, Schroeder, Fuerbringer, couple others) was the “other Gospel” (finally also carrying with it an “other” soteriology) present in that old strand of Missouri which both Preus brothers, Jacob and Robert–“alien Norwegian Lutherans who had crept into our camp”–picked up on, possibly believed themselves. So Bob Bertram’s book is titled A TIME FOR CONFESSING. When it comes to Biblical hermeneutics, the issue is NOT the historical-critical method, but the hermeneutics commended by the Lutheran Confessions.

[Primary essay on that is Bertram’s “THE HERMENEUTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF APOLOGY IV.” On the Crossings website–www.crossings.org– Click on “Library,” then “Works of RWB,” and scroll down to the title. Bob’s axiom: “Biblical hermeneutics is at no point separate from Biblical soteriology.” In nickel words: How you read the Bible is always linked to how you think people get saved.]

At four places during those ten years–1974-83–the tension really increased internally.

1. When Ralph Bohlmann, the new president at Concordia Seminary, threatened to sue if we didn’t stop calling ourselves “Concordia Seminary” in Exile. Group 2 said: “Good, we’ll be hauled in before magistrates to confess. Jesus predicts just such scenarios. We’ve got one!” Group 1 said “Go to court? Before magistrates? Come now, let’s be reasonable. We’ll change the name. We’re called Seminex now anyhow. So how about Christ-Seminary – Seminex?” And so it was.
2. May Massacre 1977. Seven colleagues – contracts not renewed. “Money is short, we just have to do it.” Others said: “During a time for confessing you can’t throw

anybody out of the boat. Let's go on reduced rations." The colleagues departed.

3. Internal governance. Bob Bertram's genius creation of a community "order" for our life together. A tour-de-force of two-kingdom organization for an outfit that was both a community of God's right hand and a community of God's left hand. The "rule" in this order was, said Bob, taken from the Dominicans at the time of their founding in the 13th century: The decision-makers shall be the consequence-takers, and the consequence-takers shall be the decision-makers. It was adopted—by the three "member classes" of Seminex's constitutional order—faculty member class, student member class, and board of directors (representing our supporting constituency, our "Third Member Class"). But Tietjen was unhappy with it. Not his style of leadership. For him and others Bob's collaborative model was just too cumbersome, and piece by piece it was dismantled.
4. The decision to "deploy" faculty after our 10 years of existence in St. Louis to Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (Berkeley CA) and the American Lutheran Church's mini-seminary in Austin, Texas. And, sadly, let students still with us fend for themselves. On the faculty side Bertram, Fuerbringer, Schroeder, Dave Krause all said "NO, let's keep the community together. It's still a time for confessing. This time in the upcoming ELCA, that's for sure. So let's take Seminex as a unit into the new ELCA, a different kind of seminary—in umpteen ways. A unique gift that's been given to us, and now we bring to the ELCA. And we'll continue to raise our own funds, etc. Won't cost Mother Church a nickel."

Other side said: "Let's go to these other seminaries where we already have friends—especially on HCM issues and other

“moderate” stuff—and besides they’ve invited us to come. Now is the time.”

The student member class voted by a big majority to keep the community together and take Seminex into the ELCA as a “different” sort of seminary, But four in the faculty member class is not a majority among some 40 folks. And the board didn’t think that was a good idea either. “Enrollment continues to decline, ditto for money; we’ll be dead before long if we don’t do something like this.” So two of the three member classes—faculty and board—said: Let’s go. After that it was “splained” again to the student member class, and by a modest majority they too said OK, let’s go. And so it happened.

Well, that’s the report from one who was a loser on all four of those issues. To hear the other side, talk to dear Seminex colleagues from those days (half of whom are still alive) who viewed each of these episodes through different lenses.