

Seminex Remembered – Four Crucial Votes

ANNOUNCEMENT #1. *Mark your calendars for June 24-25, 1999. St. Louis area Seminex grads are convoking a 25th anniversary gathering here where it all started in 1974. Spread the word around. The planners say that details will soon be forthcoming. They need help for the current addresses of Seminexers in today's diaspora. Such info sent to me I'll pass on to them.*

ANNOUNCEMENT #2. *The Lutheran World Federation [LWF] is sponsoring a consultation in Wittenberg (yes, Germany) from Oct. 27-31 on "Justification in the World's Contexts." It is addressed to "younger theologians, both male and female, in the world's Lutheran churches and invites participation in an interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue." That means I'm too old, but some of y'all ought to be there. See the LWF web page www.lutheranworld.org for details.*

Seminex Remembered, Sixth Installment.

ThTh 13's last paragraph said: "Seminex had a tri-partite corporate governance structure. There were three classes of members: Faculty, students, and the board (representing our supporting constituency). When two of those three agreed on something it became policy." [One respondent corrected my memory: it was not "two out of three" who had to agree on policy, but all three of the three.] That paragraph concluded: "The student member class of the Seminex corporation also deliberated and voted on all major Seminex decisions. I remember that at least on one of those 4 crucial issues, the majority of

students voted with us on the 'losing' side in the faculty member class vote."

What were those four issues?

- One was changing our name.
- A second was changing our internal governance model.
- A third was not renewing the contracts of seven colleagues.
- A fourth was the decision to leave St. Louis.

1. NAME CHANGE

The initial legal name of the Seminex venture was "Joint Project for Theological Education" [JPTE]. It was an entity put together during the hectic month between Tietjen's suspension on Jan. 20, 1974 and the sacking of the entire faculty majority at high noon on Feb. 18, the deadline (sic!) for us to accept Martin Scharlemann, our major accuser, as acting president of Concordia Seminary and then continue business as usual. JPTE consisted of three, and then four, partners. Initially it was St. Louis University, Eden Seminary, and us soon-to-be exiled Concordians, a coalition hammered out by John Damm, our academic dean at Concordia, during that month-long interval. Shortly after we resumed classes at the SLU and Eden campuses, the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago [LSTC] became JPTE's fourth partner, giving us a formal connection to a Lutheran seminary, which then granted the degrees to our graduates at the May commencement .

But "Seminex" was not our official name. Instead it was everybody's shorthand, right from the start, for "Concordia Seminary in Exile." Also right from the start came our logo, the chopped-off stump with a new branch sprouting from the base, Prof. Bob Werberig's gift to us all. But even Concordia Seminary in Exile didn't become our legal corporate name until June 21, a

few weeks after that first commencement. Before long the Missouri Synod and Concordia Seminary itself began to make noises about their proprietary claim to the name Concordia Seminary, and if we did not cease and desist, the civil courts would compel us to do so. Our legal counsel said they didn't have a case for such name ownership. When after an initial relenting of their dunning they pressured us again, we decided to find a new name and stay out of court.

But that decision was not at all unanimous. Being hauled into court to testify for our faith and actions sounded very Biblical to many of us. Missouri Synod's president Preus had succeeded in never allowing us to take the public "witness-stand" within the synod as he pursued his program against us. What irony if now Missouri's case against us would "finally" put us on the witness stand, but now in Caesar's court. Wasn't that exactly what the Lutheran confessions meant with their terms "tempus confessionis, status confessionis," a time for confessing, a (witness) stand for confessing? Rather than following common sense and stay out of court, wasn't this of a piece with our exilic calling? Of course, the outcome was unpredictable, but what else is new? Isn't this exactly what Jesus meant in the Gospels with his words about apocalyptic times: Christians being put on the witness stand "before magistrates?" And what would we then say if it came to pass? Not to worry, he counsels (ala Luke 22): "Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict." We pushed this perspective, but for some colleagues such a direct connection between these words of Jesus and our own situation sounded biblicistic. They were not convinced.

So "being reasonable" prevailed over this alternate counsel. We finally opted for "Christ Seminary – Seminex" and stayed out of

court. I still wonder what the “Christ” word in that name signalled in terms of the crunch situation in which we chose it.

2. INTERNAL GOVERNANCE

During those early months in exile “ad-hoc-ery” characterized our operational style. Example: We had no president. Tietjen was still captive to the long-drawn-out process required by the Missouri Synod’s Handbook (canon law) to verify and finalize the seminary board’s charges and action against him. In that scenario one delay followed another, often a macabre mixture of humor and the horrendous. E.g., the action against Tietjen, according to “the book,” needed to be ratified by his district president. But which was his district? The one he came from, the (non-geographical) English district, where he still held membership and chaired a committee, or the one in which the seminary was located, the Missouri district? Harold Hecht, president of the former, was solidly John’s supporter. Herman Scherer, president of the latter, was also a member of the seminary board that had suspended Tietjen. Our adversaries had finessed a bylaw change at the synod’s New Orleans convention (1973) which was interpreted to give the Missouri district’s president jurisdiction in the case. But propriety dictated, said President Scherer, that in view of his prior involvement he should absent himself from further stages in the process. So a vice-president of the Missouri district reviewed the case, had long discussions with Tietjen, and finally declared him “kosher.” That was significant, since this veep was known as a solid conservative, and his “surprising” verdict discombobulated the steam roller that was finally supposed to “take care of Tietjen.” But of course in the end it did.

Tietjen was still living at the president’s home and on salary at Concordia Seminary as this process dragged on. The final act of severance came on 12 October 1974. He didn’t immediately move

over to Seminex, however, since by then we had a constitution and bylaws for due process in such matters. But it was a foregone conclusion. John became our president on January 31, 1975, a full year after his suspension at Concordia. The board affirmed that this was not a new call, but their invitation for him to "continue the exercise of the call" that brought him to Concordia Seminary 6 years earlier and now to do so "in the office of the president of Concordia Seminary in Exile."

Seminex was birthed and already into its third (or was it fourth?) academic quarter before John was finally "released" from his Babylonian captivity to join the rest of us. During our first year we had a communal president, a junta, consisting of the Faculty Advisory Committee from pre-exile days, with Academic Dean John Damm designated our CEO. "Major policy decisions were made by the whole community, faculty and students consulting together in a kind of town meeting. Radical democracy was the rule during the first months of Seminex. Students and faculty spent as much time on issues of governance as on education." [Tietjen's words in "Memoirs in Exile," 221]

But with Tietjen not directly involved in our deliberations during Seminex's entire first year, important pieces of our common life were set in place without his active leadership. Most important in that regard was our document for internal governance, brainstormed by Bob Bertram, "processed" by all of us as Tietjen describes above. Complex, yes it was, but no more complex than its theological blueprint, a Lutheran two-kingdoms paradigm [2KP] crafted for a Seminex that was both a churchy, yea Lutheran, community and a "left-hand" regime in the world of academe. It was another instance of Christian simultaneity, implementing God's right hand and left hand work, both at the same time. This governance model never got to be known as well as other aspects of our common life did. In retrospect some of us called it Seminex's "best-kept secret." But it didn't last

long.

Tietjen initially supported the governance paradigm and commended it to the board in his early days in the president's chair. But the board found it too strange, too novel, vis-a-vis known patterns of good management and did not adopt it. Little wonder. Where had they ever encountered a 2KP management model in the "real" worlds that they came from? Eventually Tietjen too found it cumbersome since "the process made it almost impossible to engage in holistic planning for the future," he said. His own model of leadership "was not authoritarian dictation, but consensus building. Nevertheless leaders had to be given the freedom to lead."

Our 2KP didn't do that for John. At root was two differing views of the 2KP, I think. John occasionally articulated his own picture of the 2KP. "The internal conflict at Seminex," he says (Memoirs 282) led him "to understand clearly the paradox of institutions—all institutions including ecclesiastical ones. The paradox is this: Institution is essential for the church's ministry, and at the same time institution is inimical to the church's ministry." By definition, he said more than once, institutions carry the mark of the beast.

In systematic theology classes students were hearing a different perspective. Namely, both God's left hand and right hand work in the world proceeds through institutions. But there are two different kinds of institutions, two different kinds of palpable structures. Each kind of institution takes its genius from what's initially in God's two respective hands, God's law of equity and God's gospel of promise. Gospel-grounded institutions are not "inimical to the church's ministry." They are the foundation of it. Institutions grounded in God's other hand, God's law of equity, can be and readily are serviceable for institutions of the other hand.

Bertram formulated a show-and-tell scenario to illustrate this. His acronym was the Latin word DEXTRA, adjective for the "right" hand. Bob would hold out his two hands, fingers closed, palms touching, before the class. Then came the spiel: The two kinds of institutions are D for different. One is left, one is right. They are E for equivalent. Five fingers and a palm that match the other five and palm. Then came X, Christ and his Cross from the right hand that penetrates, shall we say "crosses," (right hand fingers moving through left hand fingers) the left hand and starts to overturn it. Then comes T. Initially the left hand—now beneath the right—"trusses" (supports) the right hand. Slowly the right hand "replaces" (=R) the left, and finally A "antiquates" it as an item of the old eon that passes away. Seminex's first internal governance model incarnated this 2KP. But it too passed away.

In the middle years of Seminex's decade, 1974-83, our "regula" for life together was weaned away from its 2KP into the "management by objectives" [MBO] model—we called it "goal-setting"—which was all the rage in the business world of the middle seventies. Our board even authorized a \$10,000 expenditure to engage an "outside, neutral, and objective consultant to facilitate the process of the review of the nature, mission and governance" of Seminex. Those words "outside, neutral, and objective" were the tolling bell for the 2KP in our corporate life. Mobley-Luciani Associates came in to help us get on with goal-setting. They were "pure Athens," and had no antennae for what our sort of "Jerusalem" was all about. Those of us committed to notions of exile (ala the Letter to the Hebrews), of a 2KP for structuring common life, of organizational structures necessitating shared responsibility and shared accountability, where "the decision-makers are the consequence-takers" and vice versa, failed to convince the Athenians. In retrospect, we shouldn't have been surprised, we

hadn't done very well with our own faculty colleagues either. With students we did a bit better, but not enough to keep MBO from nudging the 2KP into oblivion.

That's two of the four episodes where I think we strayed from our exilic calling. Next time, d.v., faculty reductions and closing shop in St. Louis.

Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder