

The Wars of Missouri that Led to Seminex. A Retrospective. Part II

Colleagues,

Here's the second half of the book review begun with last week's posting of ThTh 482.

Paul A. Zimmermann. A SEMINARY IN CRISIS. THE INSIDE STORY OF THE PREUS FACT FINDING COMMITTEE. St. Louis, CPH. 2007. 153 pp. (plus 290 pp of appendices). Hardcover \$50.

Item #3. Martin H. Scharlemann

With his fixation on the “historical-critical method” [HCM] Paul Zimmermann [PZ] doesn't notice that Scharlemann's “Angst” about the seminary, when he wrote that letter to President Preus, actually pointed to the systematic theology department and away from Biblical exegesis as PZ chronicles “A Seminary in Crisis.”

Even more, he completely ignores—never mentions—that it was Martin Scharlemann who brought HCM to Concordia Seminary when he arrived as Professor of New Testament in 1952. That is the Scharlemann enigma. The one who introduced it to the LCMS became a major critic of those who learned it from him.

For “youngsters” who may be reading this, who know not Scharlemann, here is a brief bio—gleaned from Google:

“Martin H. Scharlemann (born 28 December 1910 in Nashville, Illinois, died 23 August 1982 in St. Louis, Missouri) did his undergraduate study at Concordia College (St. Paul, Minnesota)

and Concordia College (Fort Wayne, Indiana). He graduated from Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) in 1934 and served congregations in Minnesota, Indiana, Missouri and Wisconsin. Scharlemann earned M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Washington University (St. Louis) in 1936 and 1938, respectively, and a Doctor of Theology degree from Union Theological Seminary (New York City) in 1964. In 1941 he became an Air Force chaplain and served for eleven years. He remained active in the Air Force Reserve until retirement in 1971, attaining the rank of brigadier general. He served on the faculty of Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) from 1952 until 1982 as a professor of exegetical theology. During his tenure he was director of graduate studies from 1954 to 1960 and was acting president for three months in early 1974. For the Missouri Synod he served on the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, the Social Concerns Commission and the Commission on Church Literature. Scharlemann wrote nearly 200 journal articles ranging from military chaplaincy manuals to scholarly theological papers. He also served as an editor for military and church publications.” So far Google.

Until he arrived at Concordia Seminary in 1951, HCM was a no-no with all the profs teaching the Bible. [I know, for they were my teachers.] Martin was the first one to have learned HCM apparently on his own—I wonder where? how?—and judged it to be kosher when he came back to teach at his alma mater. The other Biblical profs whom he joined at the seminary were trained “old school” where “higher criticism” was off limits. Those with earned doctorates had done their grad studies at secular universities in the classical languages, but stayed clear of the dangerous novelties that were aborning in Biblical studies at those non-Missouri graduate schools.

Martin too, freshly graduated from the St. Louis seminary in the midst of the depression (and thus no pastoral “calls”

available), followed this path and took his M.A. and Ph.D. at Washington University in St. Louis. His doctoral dissertation was on "The Influence of the Social Changes in Athens on the Development of Greek Tragedy." He doubtless used HCM with these classical Greek texts. The very title of the dissertation intimates that. But how he came to adopt HCM for studying the Bible—I wonder, I wonder. By the time he got his second doctorate from Union Seminary in New York, explicitly in New Testament studies, he was doing HCM full tilt.

Martin's first "students" at Concordia Seminary were his own Bible-teaching colleagues for whom HCM had always been the plague. Some he convinced that it was OK—even for Missouri Lutherans—some he didn't. [I know, for in my last year as a Concordia student Martin was on the scene. I was even a TA (in Hebrew!) for one of the "old school" profs in those days.]

Much wider was the audience Martin attracted among the students. The brightest and best of these students went on to places like Harvard to do doctorates in Biblical studies—where HCM was standard operating procedure. And they went with Martin's recommendation. When in the sixties they then came back as new young profs—HCMers all of them—Martin rejoiced. But then something happened. And I could never figure it out and never learned from him what it was.

I was teaching at Valparaiso University during those years and saw Martin only occasionally at family gatherings in St. Louis. [Remember, his wife and my wife were sisters.] He had supported the analogous "new look" in law-gospel Lutheranism at Valpo (a university Missouri-rooted, but not owned) and got me lecture-invitations to places where he had influence. He even took me along—and got me to sign up—to the Society for Biblical Literature and Exegesis, THE club of Biblical scholars, an ecumenical outfit where he was a known figure. When his own

troubles in Missouri started bubbling in the early 60s because of his HCM habits, he enlisted my support.

I sent a postcard (only 3 cents then. I've still got a few in my Scharlemann file folder with the mimeographed message on it.) to a couple dozen "significant" Missouri Synod folks whom I knew. Here's the full text: "March 1962. Colleagues, Perhaps you know that the LCMS praesidium [Missouri-ese for the "office" of the synod president, in this case John Behnken] has asked for Martin Scharlemann's resignation 'for the good of the synod.' Since the praesidium functions vicariously for the congregations and individuals who actually ARE the synod, it would be well for the praesidium to hear—via letter or wire—whether the synod thinks this request IS in ITS best interest. Another question on which the praesidium ought to hear synod's opinion is whether any cause other than convicted heresy or open immorality is ever grounds for resignation. For the Good of Synod please make your opinion known."

The receivers responded. A number of them sent me copies of their letters to the praesidium in support of Martin. Ironically, four of these copies carry the signatures of C.Graesser, E.Kalin, J.Damm, A.Weyermann—people at that time pastors and later part of that faculty majority who were on Martin's list of "bad guys" in his letter to Preus calling for the FFC.

Also in my Scharlemann file is Martin's hand-written postcard—green ink! Airmail and thus 5 cents!—to me after my postcard went out: "20 Mar 62. Many, many thanks! The upheaval was so violent that all at once it was decided to call off everything. The new story: that I was only asked to take a leave of absence. The letter I received says: 'We advise you to resign.' This is for your information in case the question comes up. Yours was really an effective card. Regards from all of us!

Martin.”

But that wasn't the last of it. At the LCMS convention later that summer of 1962 in Cleveland, Martin gave up the fight. Just three months after that green-inked “happy” post card! In the Cleveland 1962 “Convention Bulletin” of June 28, 1962, you find this:

By a vote of 650 to 17, the convention Tuesday evening voted to “assure Dr. Scharlemann of its (Synod’s) forgiveness,” following a dramatic afternoon session at which the St. Louis professor read a prepared statement on the floor of the convention in which he said, “I deeply regret and am heartily sorry over the part I played in contributing to the present unrest within Synod.” [EHS: Can synods forgive sins? And what about those 17?]In his statement he said, “ . . .by the grace of God, I am – as I have been in the past – fully committed to the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures. I hold these Scriptures to be the Word of God in their totality and in all their parts and to be utterly truthful, infallible and completely without error.”

Now if Zimmermann had given us the “inside story” on what happened to Martin between March and June in 1962, for us in the family that would indeed have made the book worth its \$50 price tag. But PZ doesn't do that, and I was never able to found out from Martin either.

One more thing from my Scharlemann file folder, namely, the sacking of the “faculty majority” for refusal to accept Martin, who had now become our primal accuser, as our Acting President at the seminary after John Tietjen's removal. The board must have been mad to think that we could accept the leadership of the very one who had “confided” to President Preus that we were false teachers, so seriously false that we “threaten[ed] to

deface the Lutheran character of the life and instruction going on at Concordia Seminary." What could the board possibly have been thinking? And Martin too? But eventually we were given an ultimatum to do just that. Doubtless Missouri's take on authority (authority "over") was in the mix: "I'm rightfully in charge. You follow orders." Here's how it happened.

Four weeks after Tietjen's suspension on January 20, 1974—four weeks where we had not followed Martin's orders—at the next regular meeting of the seminary Board of Control, this resolution was passed and by Martin's own hand photocopied yet that night and slid under the office door of each of us in the faculty majority.

You are asked herewith to respond to the resolution below, passed by the Board of Control on the evening of February 17, 1974. You will note that your affirmative reply by noon [tomorrow] will be appreciated. MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN WHEREAS, certain members of the faculty, administrative staff and the guest faculty, since on or about the 22d day of January, 1974, have failed and omitted to carry out their responsibilities and functions as employees under their contracts of employment, and

WHEREAS, although said members of the faculty, administrative staff and guest faculty whose names are set forth on the schedule attached hereto and made a part hereof, thereafter were requested by the Acting President to resume their said responsibilities and functions, said members of the faculty, the administrative staff and the guest faculty have failed and omitted to comply with such request, and

WHEREAS none of said members of the faculty, administrative staff or guest faculty, has a legal or other right, while continuing in the employment of Concordia Seminary, to not carry out the responsibilities and functions for which he was

employed

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

The Board of Control directs the faculty, administrative staff and guest faculty to resume their respective responsibilities and functions as employees under their contracts of employment on February 19th, 1974, that on or before 12 noon February 18, 1974, they signify their assent and agreement in writing to Acting President Scharlemann to so resume their responsibilities and functions as aforesaid and those members of the faculty, administrative staff and guest faculty who fail to comply with the foregoing, having heretofore breached their respective contracts of employment, and they being in continuing breach of their contracts of employment, have terminated their employment which results also in a termination of all of the rights and privileges of their respective positions with Concordia Seminary, including, but not limited to the following:

1. No salaries to be paid to said members of the faculty and the administrative staff for any period subsequent to the 18th day of January, 1974;
2. No payments be made to any such member of the faculty or of the administrative staff, who provides his own living quarters, for housing allowance or in lieu of rent, for any period subsequent to the 18th day of January, 1974;
3. No such member of the faculty who is housed in any of the seminary-owned homes shall be provided with such housing subsequent to February 28, 1974;
4. No payments shall be made to such members of the guest faculty for services heretofore rendered by them; and
5. All members of the faculty, administrative staff, and guest faculty whose names are set forth on the attached schedule shall remove their personal belongings from

offices on the campus heretofore used by them and shall vacate such offices on or before February 28, 1974.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that these resolutions are without application to Dr. John H. Tietjen, to whom the contractual obligations of Concordia Seminary continue pursuant to by-law 6.79 (d) of the 1973 Handbook.

Since none of us, the accused, could imagine working with our prosecuting attorney as our leader, by high noon on the next day we all were sacked. And that's when the erroneously called "walkout" happened. Yes, we did "walk" off the campus—and did so with some ceremonial hoopla. But we did so because we'd all been fired. To stick around too long would make us guilty of trespassing—though we did have a nine-day "grace" period before we had to be out of our homes and offices.

[Some say "walkout" refers to our refusal to enter the classroom—under Martin's authority—after the students declared the moratorium. But teach we did, albeit not in the designated seminary classrooms. Instead the classrooms were everywhere any one or more profs and students clustered—in the quad, in student or profs homes, at table and above all in the meetings, meetings, meetings that happened day in, day out, in the four weeks between Tietjen's suspension (Jan. 20) and Martin's ultimatum (Feb. 18). Many a student later told us: I learned more Lutheran theology in those 4 weeks than in all the rest of my time at the seminary.

If PZ could unravel the mystery of Martin Scharlemann—both at Cleveland in the 60s and at Concordia Seminary in the 70s—that would indeed be a revelation.

Even though Marie and I maintained family-contact with Martin and Dorothy (Marie's sister) until his death in 1982, we never

talked about this sticky wicket. After his death Marie asked her sister about this change in Martin. She repeated what he'd told her: "Martin didn't change. It was the rest of the men who did." Another item of shared information from Dorothy: "President Preus never supported Martin after he became acting president." Whether or not for this reason, within a few months after assuming the seminary presidency Martin resigned. My own hunch is that he'd been used, burned, finally burned out.

Ralph Bohlmann, youngest member in the faculty minority, took the helm, a prof in our systematic theology department. PZ introduces him to the reader with this amazingly ingenuous and "innocent" remark that "Ralph Bohlmann, member of the faculty, met a few times" with PZ at the Mark Twain Hotel in St. Louis to help PZ "ask the right questions of faculty members who were reluctant to answer questions forthrightly during the investigation." Question: Is that STASI or what?

A very public Preus loyalist, Bohlmann had ghost-written Preus's "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles." That "Statement" appeared in 1972 and later became the yardstick for measuring the faculty majority's orthodoxy at the New Orleans convention a year later. From the text you could tell that a seminary insider, not the Synod president, had composed it, and that it was fingering the faculty majority as only an insider could do.

Here, however, is the surprise. In this Bohlmann/Preus "Statement" only one of the three BIG heresies of the faculty majority is the HCM. The other two items of false teaching came from the debate going on within the systematic theology department of which Bohlmann was a member. One issue was the law-gospel axiom for Biblical hermeneutics and the other was the best way to understand Article 6 of the Formula of Concord—itself not unambiguous—concerning "The Third Use of the

Law.” Though never named, the bad guys here were the five of us systematicians NOT allied with the four systematics profs on Martiin Scharlemann’s team. And the worst of those bad guys—prrecisely on these two items—were Bertram and Schroeder, the guys who had brought “Valpo” theology with them when they joined the seminary faculty (Bob in 1963, me in 1971).

Here again Scharlemann’s radar was right. It was all about “the Lutheran character of the life and instruction going on at Concordia Seminary.” First of all, just what IS this Lutheran character, and then this question: which profs, what teachings, were substantively “threatening to deface” that Lutheran character? The LCMS convention 1973 New Orleans decided that by a 55 to 45 percent vote of the delegates with its (in)famous Resolution 3-09. We bad guys were the threat. The good guys weren’t.

4. New Orleans (1973) Resolution 3-09, Missouri’s Curse.

Peace did not come to Missouri with the dismissal of the heretics. Even today, thirty-plus years later, when the false teachers, “not to be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended,” have been gone for decades, good guy and bad guy battles continue. And now the irony is that the one under charge is the synod president, Gerald Kieschnick, the most conservative, Bible-believing, president Missouri has had in ages. Yet he too is under attack from the same alligators of the 1970s—or in some cases, their surviving sons—not so much for the orthodoxy of his doctrine, but for his aberrant practice. I don’t know the details. I’m an outsider. But what I hear is that his proposals for mission and lay-ministry diverge, according to the alligators, from “what we’ve always said and done” in Missouri.

A light bulb went on a few weeks ago about how this never-ending

fight inside Missouri might just be “third and fourth generation” consequences of that killer resolution 3-09.

Here’s the scenario. I’d just met the LCMS prexy, Gerald Kieschnick (first time ever), at a Bach Society evening event here in town. That night (about 3 a.m.) a light went on. So I shamelessly posted this e-mail to him next morning. It was shortly before the LCMS convention was to open here in town. I haven’t received an answer. I’m not holding my breath.

Dear President Kieschnick, One more item to add to our conversation at the Bach Society annual meeting last evening.

Though this was our first face-to-face meeting, you said you knew who I was. I’m guessing that you therefore know how my life was changed at the LCMS convention, New Orleans 1973. From that premise, here’s an add-on to our exchange last evening.

An 8th commandment Aha! about Missouri’s continuing turmoil—and how to bring it to closure.

- 1. In a few days it will be the 34th anniversary of the New Orleans convention and resolution 3-09.*
- 2. That resolution declared 45 of us teachers at 801 to be teaching “false doctrine”—and then quoting the Formula of Concord, that we “cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less excused and defended.”*
- 3. That resolution, when passed as it was, put Missouri on record as officially breaking the 8th commandment. I.e., bearing false witness in a most public way against faithful teachers by calling them false teachers. In Luther’s words that we both memorized from his catechism, the synod did indeed “deceitfully belie, betray, slander, and defame” the neighbor.*
- 4. Even our super-critic Martin Scharlemann (who helped mightily to engineer that resolution) knew that 3-09 was*

not true, that it was, in fact, false, and thus false witness against us. Here's prima facie evidence: when Martin (my brother-in-law) became acting president of Concordia after Tietjen's suspension, he tried to convince most all of us 45 to "stay on" under his leadership because we were clearly "not false teachers at all." Resolution 3-09 was a lie. Martin was admitting it by asking us to stay on.

5. That resolution and the subsequent cleansing of the 45 of us by the seminary board of control action did not bring peace to Missouri. As you well know, since you are yourself now falsely accused by fellow-Missourians, just as we were. Here's the main point.
6. In the Small Catechism, Chief Part 1, Luther makes it a point to quote the Bible's own words about commandment-breakers—8th commandment-breakers included—that "God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations."
7. Missouri's continuing turmoil, according to this Word of God, will continue, since God Himself continues to "visit" Missouri for that 8th commandment violation of 34 years ago. How can that not be true?
8. How to stop God being Missouri's critic? You know the answer. It was Jesus' drumbeat: "Repent," and having repented, "trust the Good News."
9. So to bring God's own peace back into Missouri, Missouri needs to rescind New Orleans 3-09 just as publicly as it gave that false witness way back then. Not for political reasons, but for pastoral ones, for Missouri's own peace with God. And then to trust the Good News anew.
10. I know that you know what Jesus says are the consequences of unrepentance in such passages as Luke 13:5. It's not that we who are still alive (about half) of the original 45 need our names cleared. Christ has already done that.

It's Missouri who is in trouble—trouble with God.

11. Are you not called to the kingdom for just such a time as this? I think so.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

Back to Zimmermann's book. From his doxology in the final pages about the "blessed outcome" of Preus's leadership and his own FFC you'd think that it's been peachy-keen in Missouri ever since. But it is not yet. Even apart from Kieschnick's alligators, PZ is a bit hasty in claiming the blessing for Missouri. As Bible-believing folks know, blessing is the opposite of curse. It doesn't come so long as the curse persists. False witness brings curse, not blessing. Bible-believers know that. It's scriptural truth. But Bible-believing folks, Missourians included, also know how to get un-cursed. "Repent and believe the Good News."

Almost half of the Seminex faculty, that ancient "faculty majority," has died. The rest of us would gladly have our names cleared of the false witness still on the books in New Orleans 3-09. But it's not we who would be the most benefitted. The greatest beneficiary of 3-09 repentance would be the LCMS itself. The blessedness Zimmermann claims for God cleansing the heretics years ago (even if it were true) is small potatoes compared with getting God's curse off your back. That's real blessedness. And for Missouri to get there, Paul Zimmermann, there's but one way. Your inside story was, and still is, the wrong way.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

P.S. D.v., there will be a Part III—a word from beyond the

grave, you could almost say. Just discovered a few days ago among Bob Bertram's papers is the text of his address to the New Orleans Convention 1973. In just one page he says it all. Stay tuned.