



SEMINEX

Remembered

Edward H. Schroeder

Edited by Michael Hoy



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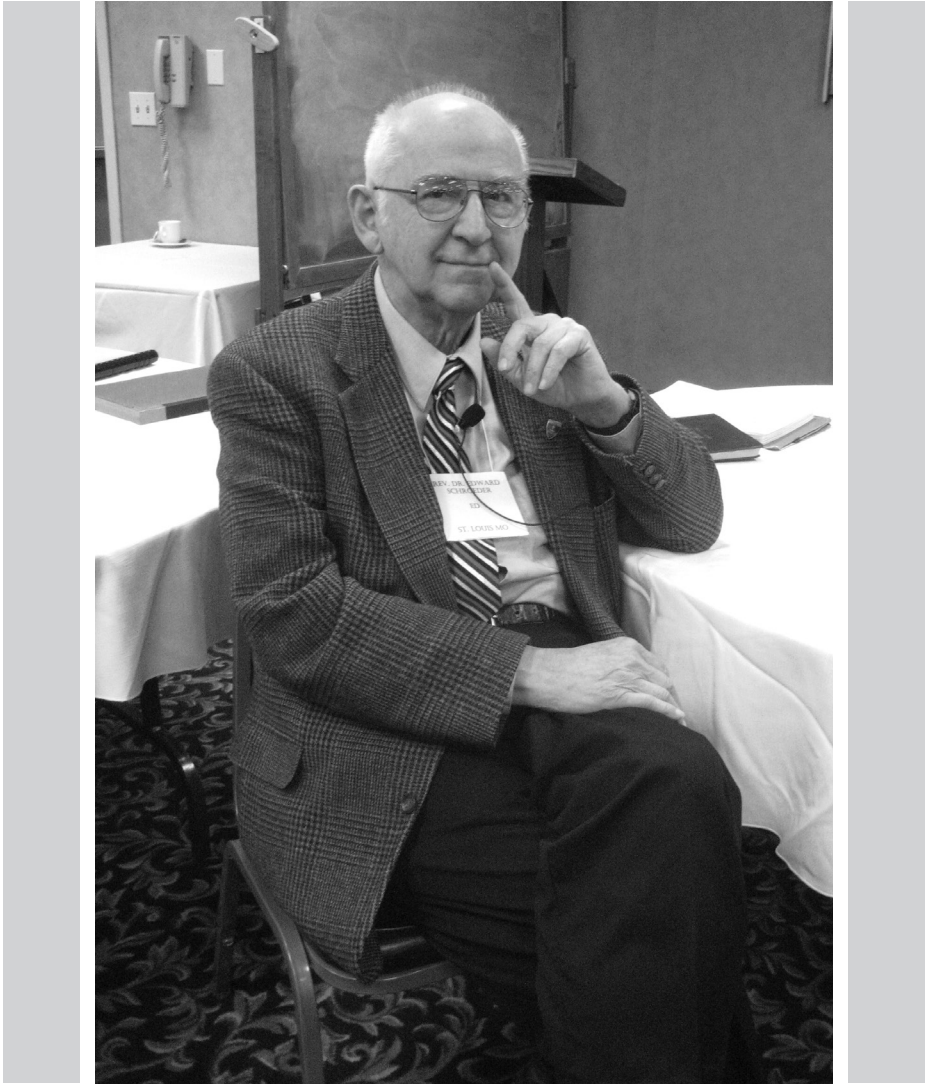
Edward H. Schroeder

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TABLE of CONTENTS



SEMINEX Remembered

Edward H. Schroeder

4. Acknowledgments
6. Foreword by Jerome Burce
10. Editor's Introduction by Michael Hoy

14. **PART ONE: Summer Conventions:
Is it New Orleans all over again?**
Thursday Theology #4 (June 11, 1998)
18. **PART TWO: Augsburg 1530 / Seminex 1974**
Thursday Theology #6 (June 25, 1998)
22. **PART THREE: Strange and Wonderful**
Thursday Theology #8 (July 9, 1998)
26. **PART FOUR: Seminex's Own Theology**
Thursday Theology #9 (July 16, 1998)
30. **PART FIVE: The Theology Department**
Thursday Theology #13 (August 13, 1998)
36. **PART SIX: Four Crucial Votes**
Thursday Theology #14 (August 20, 1998)
42. **PART SEVEN: Faculty Reductions / Closing Shop**
Thursday Theology #15 (August 27, 1998)

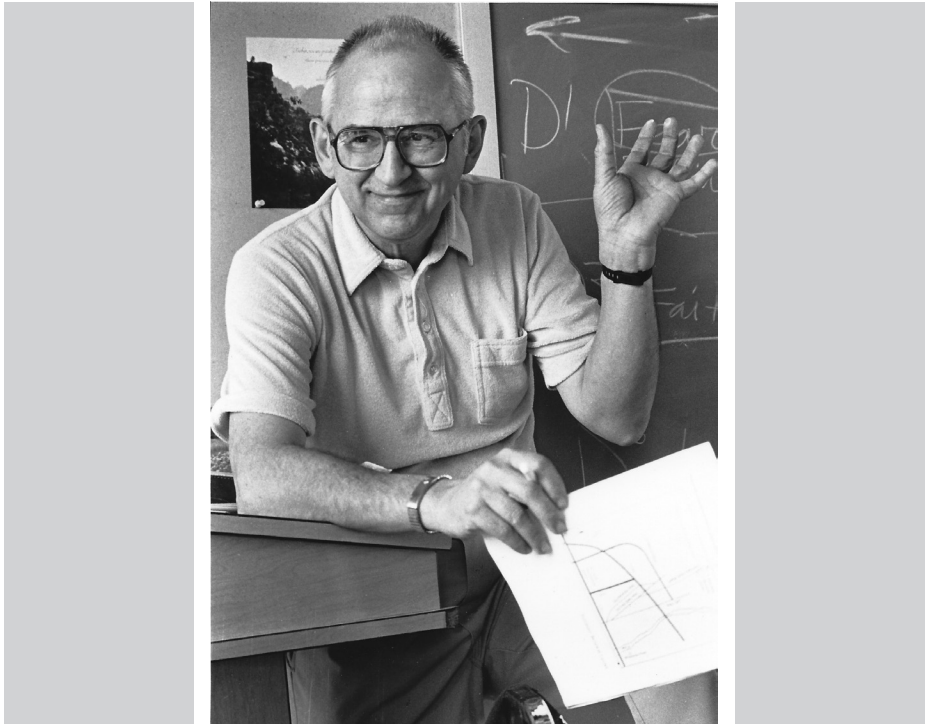
50. Afterword by Kurt K. Hendel
58. Endnotes



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While the heart of this work is credited to (the sainted) Edward H. Schroeder, we also acknowledge the contributions of Jerome Burce and Kurt K. Hendel for their excellent Foreword and Afterword, respectively. As noted in the Editor's Introduction, thanks are due to Marie Schroeder, who initially called for the publication of this work by her late husband. We gratefully acknowledge (the late) Robert Werberig for his design of the Seminex logo on the front cover of this book—a symbol that will always be treasured by those who were part of the Seminex community. We also acknowledge the assistance of Joel Thoresen, Chief Archivist for Management, Reference, and Technology for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, for providing several photographs for this book. David Mead, Editorial Director of Creative Communications for the Parish, assisted tremendously in the actual publishing of this work. Innumerable thanks are also due to the Board and many members of The Crossings Community for their suggestions, involvement, and investment in this project. Finally, our most profound thanks go to Cathy Lessmann who served as the Project Manager in seeing this book through to its final completion.

Michael Hoy, Editor, on behalf of The Crossings Community



Edward H. Schroeder teaching



Robert W. Bertram in his
classic teaching pose



FOREWORD

This booklet comes to you as a gift from Crossings, a lingering shred of Christ Seminary—Seminex, and the only one I know of that still exists in the form of an independent organization, “The Crossings Community, Inc.” as our legal name has it.

Crossings was the brainchild of Robert W. Bertram and Edward H. Schroeder, two of the many great teachers who shaped Seminex as the best Lutheran seminary in North America for a few brief years in the 1970s and early '80s.

Here is a sketch of the Seminex story as recalled by Ed Schroeder. We offer it to two audiences in particular.

The first comprises people who were caught in the story as it unfolded. I'm one of them. We were students, professors, spouses, supporters. Those of us still enmeshed in the lives God gave us through our mothers are bound to notice that 2024 is the fiftieth anniversary of Seminex's eruption—an apt phrase for describing what happened in February, 1974. If you were there or have seen the pictures, you'll recall the stream of bodies flowing lava-like down the main driveway of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis toward the little group waiting on DeMun Avenue to accommodate them in exile. Mingled in the stream were many who these days know only the enduring life God graced them with in Holy Baptism. It falls to the rest of us this year to thank God for them as well as for each other. Ed's recollections will help with this, perhaps. Or so we pray.

The second audience we've prepared this for are people for whom the word “Seminex” signifies nothing more than a faint rumor of something that happened to some other folks a while back. This is especially so of pastors and emerging church leaders who were born after Seminex disbanded. One of them told me recently that his ELCA seminary had stopped offering courses in the history of Lutherans in America. This happened about the time he got there. He knew nothing

of the Seminex story and was sorry about that. For him and others like him, this booklet will offer a quick and useful glimpse. Ask, and it shall be given, to echo Someone Else.

Of course I mention this Someone Else. How could I not? What unfolded those fifty years ago swirled around Him. It did so vividly, openly, urgently. Not that I grasped this on the day of the exile. I was a mere first-year student then, callow, confused, unable to give an adequate theological rationale for adding my body to the flow down the driveway. I went because that's where the good teachers were going, or so I guessed. Vindication of this guess came later, most vividly on a dreary afternoon in an otherwise dismal class with an especially cranky Ed Schroeder. He said something that day that got me to get the Gospel as the Gospel begs to be gotten—in the gut where it belongs. Gospel as God's good news *for me* in Christ crucified. Gospel as God's good news to pass along with joy and conviction to other hapless boneheads who were likewise ensnared in the impossible expectations of God's law, scarcely any daring to face how ensnared they were.

I can't be the only Seminex student with memories of this sort. Nor was Schroeder the only professor who forged them. Our teachers schooled us across their specialties—exegetical, historical, practical, systematic—in the sound of the Gospel. Once we caught and recognized it for what it was, we couldn't forget it. In the years that followed, most all of us reverberated with it, each in his or her own way. We were quick to notice when the gospel sound was missing from a place where it belonged. A sermon, say. Or a crucial discussion at a church assembly that ignored the cross of Christ—of all crucial things, the only thing that finally counts for anything in the life of the church. These days few things testify more loudly to the gift Seminex was than the gnashing of teeth one hears from its now retired graduates. Sunday after Sunday they go to this church or that aching to hear of Christ-for-us. Unless they catch this in the liturgy, they tend to totter home empty.

Hence Crossings. Bertram and Schroeder launched it as a project in theology for the laity and as a vehicle for Ed to earn his keep when he opted to stay in St. Louis after Seminex closed. By now we're a

nebulous network of aging Seminex students, supporters, and friends with a sprinkling of newcomers mixed in. The peculiar gifts of Bertram and Schroeder are the lesser ties that bind us. Some of us studied with them. Others got to know them through the workshops they offered for many years around the U.S. and overseas as well. (Post-Seminex Ed trotted the globe as he peddled the Gospel.) Still others encountered these two on the Crossings website, where most of their written work is lodged. This includes some Bertram gems tucked away in old newsletters. It also includes the seven hundred essays that Schroeder pounded out week after week, beginning in the late '90s, for a worldwide audience of friends and followers. He kept this up for over ten years. On arriving at the weariness of old age, he passed the task to others. Seven of the earliest essays in that series comprise the substance of this booklet. Editor Michael Hoy will say more about this in the introduction that follows.

In 2007 Crossings launched a series of biennial conferences and intervening seminars, all of which have sought to explore the riches that surface when one distinguishes the Law and the Gospel. Most of the papers delivered there are also on our website. So is an ongoing series of weekly text studies that dates back to the early 2000s. All this work aims to shine brightly with the promise of that great Someone Else, our Lord Jesus Christ. His Word, His Spirit—these are the essential ties that keep us slogging on as lesser stewards of “the promising tradition” as Bertram called it. We have Good News to keep telling amid the “oughts” and “shoulds” that choke the church as fiercely now as they did fifty years ago. So do you. We have Christ to keep confessing in a world that still needs Him desperately and ignores Him to its detriment. Again and blessedly, so do you.

Ed Schroeder’s recollections, useful though they be, are but one angle on the Seminex story. With this in mind, we asked Kurt Hendel, another onetime member of the Seminex faculty, to append an Afterword. He did so. We thank him heartily. All the more do we thank Michael Hoy for editing Ed’s prose and enriching it with an abundance of footnotes, to say nothing of his introduction.

A final note about the Seminex sound as I'll dare to call it—the Crossings sound too, or so I pray. They have been part of the gospel sound that's been ringing through the centuries, now loudly, now faintly, yet never silenced altogether no matter the nonsense that floods the church from time to time. It throbs in an eighth-century Latin hymn that people raised in the LCMS encountered only when *Lutheran Book of Worship* was published in 1978. “O Christ, our hope, our hearts desire”—that's the English title. Here is *LBW*'s fifth stanza, grievously missing from the later *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*:

Christ Jesus, be our present joy,
Our future great reward.
Our only glory may it be
To glory in the Lord.

Amen and Amen. God make this so in the hearts of all who read this and in every corner of the one holy catholic Church.

Jerome Burce, President

The Crossings Community, Inc.



Seminex Chapel Service at Grand Ave. Facility,
Mark Bangert presiding



Editor's INTRODUCTION

This collection represents Ed Schroeder's take on the whole ten-year history of Seminex. As even Ed acknowledges, his may not be the only "take" on that history, not even among all the faculty, staff, and students at Seminex; and certainly not among his critics. But he tells it as he remembers it, and with all of his faithful, theological passion.

"Seminex" means "seminary-in-exile"—specifically, Concordia Seminary-in-exile (as it was originally named, before the name change to Christ Seminary—Seminex). For some—certainly their critics, but also several Seminex supporters—there was a tendency to call the Seminex experience less of an exile than a "walk-out." But Schroeder argues vigorously that on the day Seminex was born—February 19, 1974—what truly happened was an "exile." The emergent seeds of their eventually being exiled were already present for some time. Even as students were demanded to cease their moratorium and return to their classrooms, faculty and staff were being harassed with pink slips and eviction notices from their seminary housing. When the students, faculty, and staff, marched off the campus, large boards were placed over the entrance doors, painted with the word, "EXILED." But the theology of exile, Schroeder says, would come later. He credits his faculty colleague Richard "Doc" Caemmerer, Sr., for lifting up the meaning of exile in a homily at the Seminex chapel, when Caemmerer was preaching on this text from Hebrews:

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.¹

Sadly, in Ed's telling of the Seminex story, that exilic vision was not sustained throughout Seminex's history. But he notes several faithful glimpses of it along the way.

The other key faculty colleague Schroeder credits for shaping the theological vision of Seminex is his longtime friend, Robert W. Bertram. Once colleagues together at Valparaiso University, they were colleagues at the seminary when the exile took place. More than any other theologian, Bertram lifted up how the Seminex experience, like so many others that preceded it (including Augsburg 1530), was a "time for confessing" (*tempus confessionis*). Bertram articulates that in such times there is the oppression and persecution of those who, in their faithful witness (*martyria*), are compelled to take the witness stand in testimony against their (secular) church's leadership because that leadership has misplaced the Gospel as the center of the church's life in favor of some other (adiaphoral) authority. At the heart of such controversy is not the oppression of these witnesses per se, but the oppression of the Gospel of Jesus the Christ. In such times of confessing, therefore, the witnesses faithfully proclaim, for the sake of the integrity of the Gospel, that the one-Word-and-sacraments is authority enough (*satis est*) for the church's unity.²

To be sure, the church authorities in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod were the harshest critics of Seminex. At their watershed convention in 1973, they accused the faculty at Concordia Seminary of teaching "false doctrine" which was "not to be tolerated in the church of God."

John H. Tietjen, who was president of the seminary, was suspended for fostering this so-called "false doctrine." But no formal evidence was ever established for this charge. From the "take" of these critics of Seminex, the whole matter was simply a disciplinary measure, a necessary step for a course correction of the seminary's ship. Those who stood in their way were labelled "trouble makers" because they were, in the eyes of these critics, causing schism in the church. Truth is, the real schism was because of the critics' unfaithfulness to the gospel. And "trouble makers" like Schroeder were not afraid of getting into "good trouble" (to borrow a phrase from the late + John Lewis) when the gos-

pel was at stake. As Schroeder explains, the faulty secular-management thinking of the LCMS during the early years of Seminex was the same kind of faulty secular-management thinking by the church's leadership at Augsburg in 1530. That would strike a nerve within the LCMS some twenty-five years later when Schroeder first released this "remembrance." Nonetheless, that kind of secular-management thinking by church authorities always seems to surface in "times of confessing."

Seminex is "remembered." Schroeder clearly valued Seminex and its history, and sought to tell the story of that tradition in these seven posts which he penned. They represent some of his earliest blogs, telling us how important and life-changing these "remembered" experiences were for his own life, even as they were for the lives of all who were privileged to be a part of Seminex (myself included). It is not all that Ed wrote about his experiences at Seminex—and certainly not all that he wrote on the gospel-theology that was at the center of Seminex teaching. Nonetheless, throughout my conversations with him over the years, it was readily apparent that his memory of these experiences were some of the most profound and lasting—in all their pain and struggle, to be sure (and perhaps with a little bit of despair at the end); but also in all their courage and faith, shining forth brightly in this "time for confessing." Schroeder sought to point us toward, and forward, in the gospel of our Lord Jesus the Christ.

In May of 1998, Schroeder began sending out via email some of his theological reflections on what would eventually become the Crossings blog that he created. It was named "Thursday Theology" for the day on which he made each of these posts. He then spent the entire summer unpacking his memories of Seminex, from the beginning of its history in 1974 to its historical end a decade later. Some might say, however, that the history of that tradition did not come to a close even then. For the spirit of Seminex continues to be part of the experiences of its students, faculty, and staff, who have their own stories of pain and struggle and courage and faith, but all along witnessing to the promising gospel in which Seminex was born. Seminex's history is still remembered, and with much the same theological passion.

Yet we must give the final credit for these Seminex remembrances to Schroeder's widow, Marie.

She was the one who "remembered" these posts of her late sainted husband, and had the initial idea that they should be tracked down and compiled into a collection. They were all readily available on the Crossings website (www.crossings.org). So she did just that. This is really her labor of love. Ed Schroeder's presentation of that history has been only modestly edited by me, though I have added a number of endnotes to flesh out certain points in that history.

Ed and Marie, together with the aforementioned Doc Caemmerer and Bob Bertram, and many, many other faithful witnesses of the Seminex tradition, have made the final crossings of their baptisms in the promise of their crucified and risen Lord. Their joyous faith, in life and in death, led them on toward their promising homeland. We dearly remember them and their faithful witness. February 19, 2024, will mark the fiftieth anniversary of Seminex; and, *deo volente*, we will remember that day with celebration, singing again, "The Church's One Foundation," as it once rang out on the seminary grounds when Seminex was born.

Ed concluded most of these blogs in the seven parts below with the words, "Peace and Joy." I note that Bertram closed his own correspondence with those same words, and I have often followed suit from these two mentors. Those two words come straight out of the gospel of John, when the crucified and risen Lord says, "Peace be with you," showing his disciples the crucified marks of his hands and side, leading them to rejoice with such great resurrecting joy that overcomes all fear (20:19-20).

May these words, and the memories that Ed shares with us, help us to treasure their long and promising witness, and give us courage for the facing of these days!

Michael Hoy

Christ the King Sunday, 2021



PART ONE

Summer Conventions: Is it New Orleans all over again?

Thursday Theology #4 (June 11, 1998)

Next month, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will hold its convention here in St. Louis.³ The gossip says it will be a hot one regardless of the local weather. One district president (i.e., a regional bishop) is on the carpet for practicing fellowship with the heterodox. He participated in the wedding of his niece in a service held in a congregation of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). The LCMS president and numerous overtures to the convention, as I hear from my distant vantage point, are demanding either his apology or his scalp. In a couple of weeks we'll know what they got.

Some of our friends in the LCMS sadly say: "It could be New Orleans all over again." "New Orleans," the LCMS convention of 1973, was exactly 25 years ago in July.⁴ There were many more villains at that time, however. Forty-five of us on the faculty of Concordia Seminary here in St. Louis, were on the carpet. We were bunched together in popular rhetoric as the "faculty majority." The five faculty colleagues who were our critics were the "faculty minority."

Like all church conflicts (and family fights too) there was a long pre-history to New Orleans '73.⁵ Some claimed that it went all the way back to arguments the Saxon immigrants had before they got off the boat in 1839: is scripture or scripture's Gospel the touchstone for Lutheran theology? In any case the actions taken at New Orleans were cataclysmic by everyone's judgment. They pushed the button that created Concordia Seminary in Exile (Seminox for short) six months later.

Although the entire faculty, all 50 of us, had individually undergone a two-hour interview by the LCMS president's "fact-finding committee" prior to the convention, no one of the faculty majority had been directly charged with any specific false teaching.⁶ Yet by the time New Orleans was over we were hereticized by a 60/40 convention vote for

teaching which “cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended,” a phrase from the Lutheran Confessions.⁷ I was not in New Orleans for the convention, but back in St. Louis along with others teaching summer school ostensibly doing just that kind of teaching.

There was an attempt to give substance to what our intolerable teaching was in a document published before the convention. It was the LCMS president’s “A Statement of Biblical and Confessional Principles.”⁸ We later learned that one of the minority five had ghost-written it for the president. It specified 3 doctrines where the faculty majority had gone astray. The convention accepted that document (another 60/40 vote) as a valid statement of Missouri Synod teaching, and then measured us by that yardstick. Three of our senior colleagues, Bob Bertram, Ed Krentz, and John Damm, were given 12 minutes each to tell the assembly what we really taught in the classroom. Thereafter the convention voted, and once more, 60 to 40, we failed to pass.

The heresies ascribed to us were three:

- Undermining the authority of the Bible in the way we used “historical critical methods” when teaching from the Bible,
- Practicing “gospel-reductionism,” a term invented by one of our critics (John Warwick Montgomery) to designate our alleged granting the Bible absolute authority in Gospel matters, but not in other aspects; and
- being wishy-washy on our commitment to “the third use of the law,” an intra-Lutheran hot potato from the time of the Reformation. That 16th century debate asked whether, and if so, how, the new-born Christian uses God’s law to pattern her new life in Christ.

Upon our failure to pass the test, the convention mandated the newly elected seminary Board of Control (sic!), where our critics now had the majority, to take appropriate action. Although the board regularly met each month, for a number of reasons, their timetable was stretched out until January of 1974. And in their meeting of that month, on Sunday evening January 20, they suspended seminary

president John Tietjen for malfeasance in office. He had not exercised proper doctrinal discipline on the faculty while presiding over us. And little wonder, since he too was one of the faculty majority.⁹

As Acting President, Martin Scharlemann, a leading voice in the faculty minority, was put in Tietjen's place. He was my brother-in-law. His wife and my wife are sisters. No one really knew what his mandate was from the board. But that hardly mattered, since the following day, Monday, there was no more "business as usual" at Concordia Seminary. Though Scharlemann was in office, he never presided over the seminary from which Tietjen was deposed. On that Monday the student body convened for day-long deliberations. Their final decision: a moratorium on any future class attendance until those professors be identified whose "teaching was not to be tolerated in the church of God." They knew how serious heresy was, and they wanted none of it! A day later the faculty majority, more stunned by Tietjen's suspension and less savvy, I'd say, than those students, agreed to join the students in their moratorium decision.

That didn't mean that teaching and learning stopped on campus. Students and staff were in nonstop theological conversation and action for the four weeks that followed before the next meeting of the seminary board. Many a student would later say that he (we had hardly any she's) learned more theology during those four weeks than during four or more previous semesters. There was no end of meetings—both intramural in homes and lounges and extramural with LCMS leadership. Our critics saw the moratorium as clear evidence of our rebellious natures. Clearly we needed to be disciplined. The only message we heard from them, and from the synod president as well, was that we submit to Scharlemann's leadership and trust him to do what's right. It was an administrative matter, not a matter of the Gospel itself. The issue of our alleged heresy, which was a Gospel matter, would be addressed by Scharlemann and the board in due time—and as the accused we were not the time-keepers.

Even supporters—many of them—said we were making a big mistake. But what neither these friends nor our foes sufficiently realized was that "we" the faculty were not in charge. The students had "closed

down the place” while we faculty were still numb and perplexed about our new situation. We had not led the students in making their decision. They ran their own meetings and came to their own conclusions. Later on, however, they did call us to “fess up” to our involvement in their action. How so? Our teaching, they said, had conveyed to them a clear enough fix on the Gospel to make their own theological analysis of the crisis and then to give them courage to do what they did. We could hardly have been more honored.

What all happened in those four weeks is a bit of a blur for me now. I should have kept a journal.

Yet even with the memory blur, they were unforgettable! When the board next convened, Sunday evening, Feb. 17, they authorized the acting president Scharlemann to give us the following notice: By noon of the next day (Feb. 18) we were to submit in writing our agreement to return to business as usual under his leadership. Otherwise we would be held in breach of contract and considered as having terminated our employment at the seminary. With such termination we were to be out of our offices and seminary-owned housing by the end of the month, ten days later.

We found this resolution in our faculty mailboxes Monday morning, just hours before the high-noon deadline. By 10:30 that morning we assembled in Pritzlaff Hall, together with spouses, and came to the consensus that our only response would be no response. When the seminary bells tolled the noon hour we celebrated our dismissal by singing “The Church’s One Foundation,” a hymn that had become our banner since New Orleans. Someone opened the windows toward the quad where the students had gathered while we deliberated. They joined our singing. The next day (Feb. 19) Seminex came into existence; the day thereafter we had our first classes. More next time.

Peace & Joy

Ed Schroeder



PART TWO

Augsburg 1530 / Seminex 1974

Thursday Theology #6 (June 25, 1998)

Today's the 468th anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. I thought you'd like to know. The year was 1530. Times were tough. Suleiman the Magnificent was outside the walls of Vienna with 600,000 Muslim troops, having just "scorch-earthed" his way through a big chunk of southeastern "Christian" Europe. That's why there are Muslims in the Balkans today. He seemed unstoppable. Yet he had to be stopped, and it was Charles V's job to do so. But his Holy Roman Empire of Germanic Nations was itself splitting in two as the Reformation movement grew.

So Charles called the conflicting sides to come to an Imperial Diet at Augsburg. His hope was for some sort of unity in the religious conflict—even if scissored and pasted—to get his Christian Empire unified so he could mobilize the troops to head for Vienna. Even under the best of efforts he'd have a hard time matching Suleiman's numbers. Well, the effort for religious unity at Augsburg failed. The Roman Catholic representatives never even got around to presenting their statement of faith. They were, after all, the establishment. "Everybody" knew what genuine catholicism was. So they saw their role at Augsburg to evaluate the confession of the other side and eventually compose a "confutation" to refute it. The emperor sided with the Roman critics. The reformers went home as losers. So what about Suleiman?

Just before the Diet Luther had proposed that there were two enemies outside the gates of Vienna: Suleiman and God. Luther divined that God was using Suleiman as the "rod of his anger" against Europe's hypocritical claim to be Christian. With such an ally Suleiman was invincible. Repentance, said Luther, is the only weapon that works to dissuade the enemy when that enemy is God. So repentance is what he called for—hoping for at least a few to do so, who might

thereby intercede vicariously for the multitudes who would not. For if God did relent as “maybe only ten!” did repent, Suleiman would lose his biggest ally—and his invincibility. Christian Europe might just survive.¹⁰

The historical record shows that Suleiman halted his conquest (and Islamization) of Christian Europe there outside Vienna’s walls and went back home. Even without religious unity at Augsburg, and the military alliance that Charles V might have gained through it, Christian Europe was spared. Did vicarious repentance do it? Most historians, even Christian ones, cite other reasons.

Thus the main achievement of Augsburg 1530 is “only” the Augsburg Confession. That Confession has become the touchstone for what’s Lutheran, even though the word never appears in the text. The confessors were simply seeking to state what was Christian. Granted, Luther himself is not unimportant for what’s Lutheran, but Augsburg is the standard. So in the constitutions of the 100-plus Lutheran churches throughout the world today, it is the Augsburg Confession, not Luther and his teaching, that is named in the fundamental theological article.

Luther was not present at Augsburg. A prior diet had put a price on his head. Augsburg was not in his safety zone. Surprising for many is that the AC was written by someone not ordained, Philip Melancthon. So too all its signatories were laity, princes and politicians who “fessed up” before the emperor at Augsburg with their own “Here I stand.”

The ethos of Seminex latched on to the Augsburg confessors—not only for theological substance, but also for understanding our own historical situation. We learned that we were living in a “time for confessing.” Umpteen times we were called to articulate our faith and have it examined, finally at the Missouri Synod’s New Orleans 1973 convention. As was true with the establishment party at Augsburg, we could never get our critics to “fess up” to their working theology—and let it be examined. Like the critics at Augsburg our critics claimed to be “the voice of old Missouri” by definition. Since our disagreement with them signaled that we were not, we “should seek our fellowship elsewhere.”

The prospect for unity within Missouri was gone when we in the faculty majority were fired for refusing to acknowledge our most vocal accuser as our acting president. Even though the press, both secular and churchly, interpreted our conflict as a fight about the Bible, i.e., modern vs. conservative ways of interpreting it, within Seminex it became clearer that our conflict was like the one at Augsburg. The issue was the “one Gospel and sacraments,” which Augsburg confessed as “enough” for the church’s unity. In more ways than one the Augsburg Confession of 400-plus years ago became (again) the debate focus. It was not Biblical interpretation.

One signal of that fact is that of the five loyalist members of the “faculty minority,” who then became the core of the new faculty at Concordia after the 45 of us went into Seminex, four were members of the department of systematic theology. That means they didn’t teach Bible, but their teaching turf was doctrine, ethics and the Lutheran Confessions. Only one of the five was a Scripture professor. The Battle of Missouri that led to Seminex was about what it means to be Lutheran. It was a debate about the Augsburg Confession, and that document was confessing what it means to be Christian.

It will come as no surprise to hear that that debate continued within Seminex throughout the ten years of its existence. Pushed into an exile that no one had really planned for, we constantly sought for clarity into what had happened to us, where we now were, and where we were called to be heading. None of that seeking was without vigorous debate and we did not always find consensus. More about that next time.

The word “walkout” (from the world of labor-management conflict) is often used—even by our supporters—in connection with Seminex, as though we went on strike against the administration of Concordia Seminary. Yet that is a misnomer. Admittedly this is one partisan’s perspective. It goes like this:

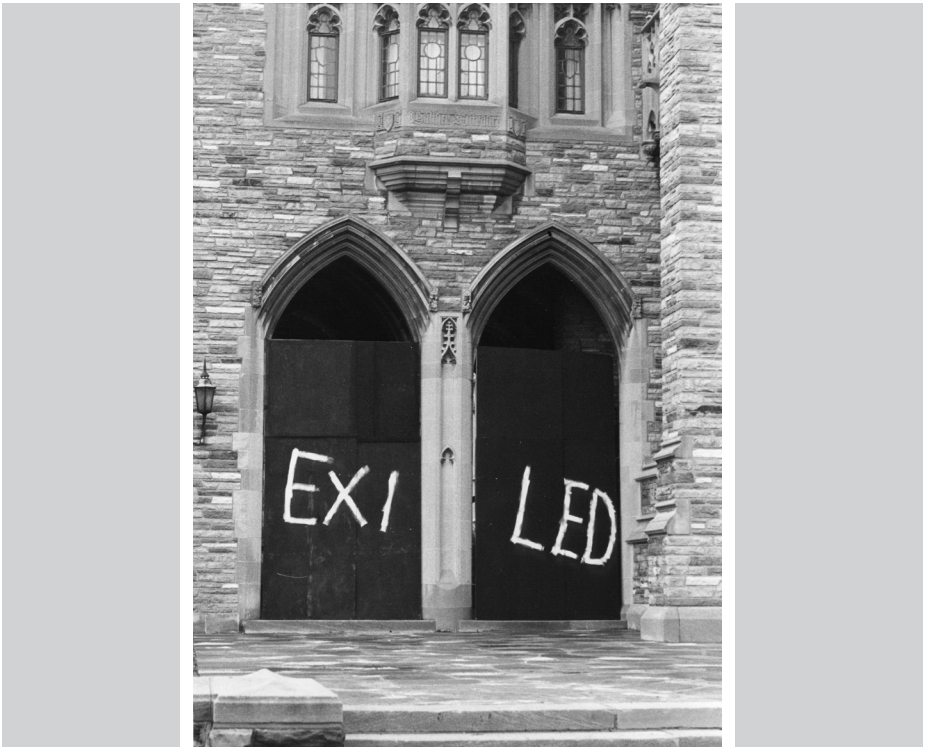
- we were tried as a group for heresy at the New Orleans Convention,
- found guilty by 60% and innocent by 40% of the delegates,

- ordered to accept (and trust!) our major critic as our new seminary president,
- fired for refusing to do so. Is that a walkout? In the rhetoric of the Lutheran confessions, we saw it as a time for confessing.

On the day after our dismissal we did indeed “walk” off campus with banners and hoopla in a grand procession to be welcomed by the theological deans of St. Louis University and Eden Seminary. The next day Seminex classes began on those two campuses. Sure there were other options, but none of them seemed sufficiently “faithful to our calling, faithful to our Lord.” We had put the word “exile” into our name, Concordia Seminary in Exile, but only later did we learn what it really meant.

Deo volente, more next time.

Ed Schroeder



Boarded archway



PART THREE

Strange and Wonderful

Thursday Theology #8 (July 9, 1998)

Warren Rubel, friend of Seminex, says he learned this from his wife on their (first?) wedding anniversary: “Warren, ours has been a strange and wonderful relationship. You are strange and I am wonderful.”

Much about Seminex, like the Rubel marriage, was strange and wonderful—often both at the same time. First of all, it was strange for us to be a seminary without a “mother” church, a supporting denomination. How do you do that? Not just how to pay the bills, but where do the graduates go?

Early on supporters appeared, eventually calling themselves the Evangelical Lutherans in Mission (ELIM). These were Missouri Synod parishes and individuals who claimed that Seminex was still “their” seminary, even though now set adrift by those in power in the synod. Throughout our ten years of existence—and of raising our own funds—these ELIMites were the largest single source for meeting our one million-plus annual operating budget. Only later did our “denomination” (actually a non-denomination) come along, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC). Even though they gladly partnered with us, their modest numbers required Seminex to continue fending for its own funds and finding placements for its graduates.

Though initially strange for us, this became wonder-full, the wonder being that it worked—year after year for a decade!

Another example: The first classes at Seminex were held on February 20, 1974, in classrooms at Eden (UCC) Seminary and St. Louis (Jesuit) University. Strange and wonderful is that both of those schools once were “enemies” of the Lutheran seminary in St. Louis. Eden was originally the school of the “Evangelical and Reformed” German immigrants, those on the other side of the fence from us Missouri Lutherans and our feisty confessionalism. And when the Congregationalists joined the “E&R” to become the United Church of Christ, their spot

out in liberal left field put them even farther beyond the pale of our orthodoxy. Only for athletic duels did Eden and Concordia sometimes get together in olden days—and everybody knew that it was the “true” faith being slugged out on the playing field.

Hospitality from the Jesuits was even more strange and wonderful. The Society of Jesus came into existence after the Reformation in the 16th century to undo what the Reformation had done to the seamless cloak of the Roman Church. But here in St. Louis four centuries later the Jesuits were sheltering us Seminex Lutherans after our own Missouri Synod had found us unseemly for its own seamless robe and sent us on our way “to seek our fellowship elsewhere,” as they said then. But fellowship with the Jesuits? Strange and wonderful!

Not all of us Seminexers—we were after all “Missouri”—were very ecumenical as we entered this exilic world. We had to learn fast. Complete strangers kept turning up to offer help, thus becoming wonderful friends. And not just other Christians. We had to swallow hard and think fast as Jewish supporters showed up with gifts to offer, such as housing for displaced students and faculty. We benefitted from widespread and mostly positive media coverage, not just here in our hometown, but in the church and secular press throughout the land, and even overseas. We didn’t really fit the hero’s mold, though often we were cast as such.

Evidence of the international spread of the Seminex story we learned a year or two later, as news came back to us of an Aoyama Seminex in Tokyo (Methodist) and a Korean Seminex (Presbyterian) in Seoul, both of them seminaries recently exiled who took our name as their own after power purges in their own contexts. A contingent of St. Louis Seminex faculty and students eventually made a pilgrimage to these Seminexes of Asia. You can imagine the encounters—well, maybe you can’t! Call it strange and wonderful. One teacher from Korean Seminex, Steven Moon, later on did an intermester as guest prof with us in St. Louis. He was wonderful, though I think he found us a bit strange. We seemed so tame. Korean Seminex was really radical. Both students and faculty had this common denominator: all had served prison terms before they got to the seminary. They had done their

confessing vis-a-vis the “Caesars” of Korea in the ’70s, and Caesar made them pay for it. Our losses, such as they were, didn’t quite compare.

The Seminex story told by the media, even the church media, was regularly disappointing. Conservative vs. liberal Bible interpretation, due process, power politics, personality clashes, academic freedom—these were their regular angles for interpreting us to the public. Granted these elements were in the mix. Granted general readers and viewers could comprehend stories focused on such issues. Granted also that church squabbles are complex affairs. But only rarely did the reporters get to the Gospel issue (better the “law and gospel” issue) beneath the surface diagnoses. Not all of us in Seminex caught on very fast either as to what our story really was, though some saw it sooner than others.

One such early “seer” was Doc [Richard R.] Caemmerer. Unforgettable is his chapel homily early in our history on the text of Hebrews 11:13ff. We Seminexers are in exile, quoth he, not from the Missouri Synod to which we might be hoping someday to return—though that is what most (all?) of us thought at first. No, said Doc, that would be “looking back, to that land from which they had gone out,” which the Old Testament patriarchs and matriarchs precisely did NOT do. Not so the Hebrews image of exile. These ancient believers saw exile as separation from a homeland that they had never yet seen, one up ahead where they had never yet been.

Ours too, Doc proclaimed, is a homeland up ahead, a new place where High Priest Jesus is leading his entourage. And it’s not just for us; this Gospel notion of exile applies to the entire Christian church. To be bruised and battered by folks thought to be companions on the way, as the Hebrews are in the text, is par for the course. All the more reason to look to the author and finisher of our faith—especially when facing burnout—to get refueled and re-encouraged, and to press on with the journey. Like those ancient folks of faith, we too don’t know where the future will take us, but we do know Who is taking us there. “That is enough,” as the Augsburg Confession says: *satis est*.¹¹

More than once our community’s internal discussions and debates (I hesitate to say “fights”) were on that topic: If exile is following our High Priest toward an unknown homeland up ahead, what’s our calling now, as we face a specific sticky wicket, to stay on the path? By my count

there were four such extra-sticky wickets, crunch debates, during our ten-year existence in St. Louis. Since I was on the “losing” side when each of these four came up for a vote, you will understand that most Seminex colleagues—faculty, students, staff, and board members—saw them differently.

According to my lights these four crunch times were:

- when we changed our name,
- when we changed our internal governance structure,
- when we “chose” seven colleagues for non-reappointment,
- when we opted to close down in St. Louis and “deploy” to three other Lutheran seminaries as the ELCA merger was coming over the horizon.

It seemed to me that Doc Caemmerer’s early “aha” about our exile was central in each of these, and that in these four decisions we departed from that image of our calling. Methinks we signaled our exhaustion (and Seminex was wearying), not our excitement (some things were just too strange and not wonderful at all), and hardly any Melchizedekian *chutzpah* (à la Hebrews) to “keep on truckin’” toward a future we could not clearly see. But Doc had shown us—according to the Scriptures—that we did not need to have it blueprinted for us in advance. Yet the majority vote went otherwise.

More about this next time.

Peace & Joy

Ed Schroeder

P.S. Another item strange and wonderful. Part Two: Augsburg 1530/Seminex 1974 [Thursday Theology #6 (June 25, 1998)] did somehow get close to the head office of today’s LCMS. So close that an assistant to the synodical president sent off an email the next day to his “Cyberbrethren” to disconnect any linkage between Seminex 1974 and Augsburg 1530. Our farewell march from the Concordia Seminary campus, he said, was a publicity stunt. Augsburg was about serious confessing.



PART FOUR

Seminex's Own Theology

Thursday Theology #9 (July 16, 1998)

Both friends and foes—then and still now—talk about “the theology of Seminex.” Just what was that? It’s not easy to specify—even for us Seminexers. Critics from within the Missouri Synod painted our theology with the “liberal” brush. For some that meant “Bible-doubters”—i.e., we didn’t believe the six-day creation that the Bible teaches; we were skeptics about Jonah’s fishing trip; etc. For others it was a “theology of rebellion against church authority.” The acting president who replaced John Tietjen saw it this way. “The only way to respond to rebellion is to crush it,” he said.

But since no one of us profs was ever granted the benefit (sic!) of a heresy trial before Seminex happened, “our theology” was never articulated before any tribunal whose proceedings you could then refer to. Even though the New Orleans convention (1973) affirmed by a 60/40 vote that our theology was “not to be tolerated in the Church of God, much less excused or defended,” just what made it so frightful was always fuzzy among our critics. Serious searchers had a tough time trying to pinpoint our specific heresy. On the field of world Lutheranism, “everybody” knew that the Seminex crowd was still clearly at the conservative end of the Lutheran spectrum. They knew that “Missouri” leopards don’t change their spots. Or if they ever do, it’s not very much.

In 1972, the year before the New Orleans convention, the Concordia Seminary “faculty majority” was asked by Missouri’s regional district presidents to tell the church what our theology really was. We did that with “An Affirmation in Two Parts: Faithful to our Calling, Faithful to Our Lord.” Part I was a “Joint Statement and Discussion of Issues” signed by all 45 of us, and Part II a collection of “Personal Confessions” from each of us. That was the closest thing to a statement of what later could be called the “theology of Seminex.” But the hopes of these district presidents for the peace-making and trust-building that this would bring in the controversy were dashed by Missouri’s President

Preus finessing it to irrelevance for the policy he was pursuing. Both parts are still very good stuff, I think, though I am not unbiased since I was one of the two colleagues assigned the job of composing the joint statement.

One product from the department of systematic theology just before Seminex was a “Reader in Law-Gospel Reconstructionist Theology.” Its title: “The Promising Tradition.”¹² The key terms in those phrases signaled the publication’s context and its center. One of our accusers had popularized the epithet “Gospel-reductionism” to label what he said was our heresy. For him that meant we acknowledged the authority of anything that was “Gospel” within the scriptures, but everything else in the Bible was fair game for historical-critical hanky-panky. The title we gave to our reader (my concoction) sought to take our critic’s term and re-vision it with the theology of the Lutheran Confessions. That meant a law-gospel hermeneutic for re-constructing our “Missouri” theology, and the Gospel’s own promise as the center of it all.

This reader was used for only a term or two at Concordia before the explosion came, and then became our textbook, of sorts, for systematic theology at Seminex. In subsequent editions it grew to include 30 essays from 8 authors.

But for the general public—both churchly and secular—it was the teaching done by the profs in the Biblical fields that had gotten us into trouble in the Missouri Synod, and that later was the hallmark for the theology of Seminex. The exegetes (teachers doing “exegesis,” i.e., interpreting the Bible), not the systematicians (we who were teaching doctrine, ethics, the Lutheran confessions), were the heroes (or villains, depending on your point of view) of Seminex’s theology. That’s not untrue, but not the whole truth. Already at Concordia, and constantly at Seminex, conversations (debates?) ensued about the “law-Gospel” hermeneutic being done in systematics and the “historical-critical method” in Biblical studies. At least once NT scholar Ed Krentz and I put together a semester-long seminar for Seminex students with the short-hand title: HCM and LGH (Historical-Critical Method and Law-Gospel Hermeneutics).

So I think the “theology of Seminex” was an ellipse with two centers—HCM and LGH. In my judgment we never succeeded to get them completely to coincide.

For more than a generation of students back at Concordia Seminary, “systematics” had a bad press among the illuminati. By synodical tradition “dogmatics” (doctrine) was on the throne, and the task of Bible teachers was to supply the prooftexts to support what the doctrinal manuals taught. But after World War II many students disdained both that kind of dogmatics and that kind of exegesis. It was really “new” in my student years at Concordia (1950-55) when new professor Martin Scharlemann introduced—very, very gently—historical-critical methodology in his New Testament teaching at the sem. He eventually caught flak for it and in a subsequent convention of the synod “apologized” for the turmoil he had brought. But he never really changed his HCM style of teaching, and shaped a generation of graduates with that sort of exegesis. The whiz-kids among his students went off to Harvard (and other schools) for graduate studies and in a few years were his colleagues in exegesis back at “the” sem.

Understandably Martin’s “new look” for Biblical exegesis discom-bobulated his own colleagues in the Biblical department; but he was a gifted teacher, and by the time his own “brightest and best” came back from grad school to join the faculty, HCM was standard procedure in the department. The irony (or is it mystery?) that no one can satisfactorily explain is that Martin later became the most vocal critic of the Biblical work done by these former students as the battle for the seminary developed. He identified himself with the other four of our colleagues in the “faculty minority,” and wound up as the acting seminary president when Tietjen was finally suspended.

How LGH got to the seminary I have described in an earlier post.¹³ The way Bob Bertram articulated it within the department of Systematic Theology even before Seminex (13 November 1968) was this way:

What is most ‘systematic’ about systematic theology is, not merely that it arranges its material—say, the biblical data—in this or that orderly way (that much is true of all the theological disciplines), but rather that it consciously and explicitly insists on asking

'Why.' It asks for The Sufficient Reason, The Adequate Basis, The Fons, never resting until it has found 'Reason Enough.' Why, for what reason finally, is this or that Christian claim made? By saying that the systematician asks for the 'why,' I am not suggesting that he does not know what it is. On the contrary, because he does know, at least in principle, what that sufficient reason is, his asking is meant chiefly to ask it into clarity, into the full prominence it deserves. He cannot even settle for the explanation, 'Why, because Scripture says so.' He still persists and asks again, 'And why, in turn, does Scripture say so?' His job is done only when he has traced the reason back to The Source: namely, God's reconciling the world unto himself in Christ Jesus—in other words, the gospel. The systematician's task is to 'necessitate' Christ.

His task is properly to distinguish law from promise. But this distinguishing is not an end in itself. Law and promise need distinguishing so that they can be restored to the original relationship in which they already operate within scripture. The trouble is that men come to that biblical law-promise relationship prejudiced by a perennial Vorverstaendnis (opinio legis), and thus recombine law and promise unbiblically, with the resultant loss of both, law and promise. The systematician disentangles this mis-meshing, does his distinguishing, so that he can restore law and promise to their original biblical—i.e., evangelical—order.¹⁴

Not all (not even most of) our systematics colleagues agreed with that back in 1968, and there was no such consensus in systematics as there was in exegesis that we were all doing our work with a common focus. So it was no wonder that half of the systematics department (four profs) joined Martin (the only one from the exegesis department) to become the “faculty minority,” the five who were the core for the new Concordia faculty after the 45 of us were dismissed and began our work at Seminex.

The consequences of these two focal points for the ellipse of Seminex's theology is a topic I'll try to address next time.

Peace & Joy

Ed Schroeder



PART FIVE

The Theology Department

Thursday Theology #13 (August 13, 1998)

The prior post concluded: “The consequences of these two focal points [Historical critical method (HCM) in the Biblical departments and the Law-Gospel hermeneutic (LGH) in systematics] for the ellipse of Seminex’s theology is a topic I’ll try to address next time.” Well, this “next” time is now four weeks later. And in these intervening weeks another of the saints of that era, Herman Neunaber, an LCMS district president deposed for his support of Seminex, has been laid to rest.

Twenty-five years ago another funeral changed our history—for a little while, at least. Concordia Seminary Professor Arthur Carl Piepkorn, my former teacher and then colleague in the systematics department, died on December 13, 1973, while waiting in the barber shop for a haircut.¹⁵ His funeral was Dec. 17. On that very day the seminary’s Board of Control was scheduled to meet and “finally” carry through on their earlier decision to remove John Tietjen from the presidency of the sem. That suspension resolution had already passed at a special meeting in August, right after the LCMS’s New Orleans convention.

The convention had given Synod President Preus a 6-to-5 majority on the seminary board, and at the August meeting that majority voted to suspend Tietjen. But the resolution was not implemented at that meeting because someone blew the whistle about due process in the whole business and the possibility of a civil suit against the board. In the subsequent monthly board meetings during the fall something always happened to postpone implementation. Given Piepkorn’s demise and the crowd that flew in for the funeral (one attendee said we were really burying the Missouri Synod) the board cancelled their meeting and postponed John’s dismissal to the next meeting on Jan. 20, 1974.

With Piepkorn gone, the systematics department at the seminary was 4-and-4. Four of our colleagues, Richard Klann, Robert Preus, Ralph Bohlmann and Lorenz Wunderlich, constituted 80% of the

“faculty minority,” the 5 loyalists who supported Preus in his cleansing program at the sem. The cleansing was not for them, of course, but for the rest of us in the “faculty majority.” That included the other half of our department: Bob Bertram, Herb Bouman, Erv Lueker, and me. When Seminex happened the four of us became its systematics department. With 90% of the Concordia students joining us in exile, our department was badly understaffed for all that we were called to do. Before long Herb Bouman retired and that left three of us. In shifting and juggling our teaching, the courses in the Lutheran confessions became our Introduction to Theology vehicle, and Bob and I concentrated there. Lueker concentrated on other parts of the department’s curriculum. Dogmatics and ethics were shared among all three of us. Each of us offered an elective every now and then both to exploit the resources of our own experience [“Theology of Confessing”] and to keep in touch with what was happening in our discipline elsewhere in the world: theology and the social sciences, third world theologies, theology and the arts.

A lot of good theology—some more, some less systematic—got done in the internal discussions (sometimes debates) as we charted our community’s course for the ten years we existed in St. Louis.

It may be a bit presumptuous to speak of two foci to the theology of Seminex. For besides HCM and LGH, there was a vibrant liturgical theology being taught and then practiced in our daily worship. Ditto for catechesis, preaching and pastoral care. And, of course, there were the Seminex subcultures, some of which I’m sure I never heard about. The ones I did know about included the expanding number of gays and lesbians who came to Seminex, as well as the growing number of women students who enrolled. Both groups challenged the mindsets we’d brought along from “old Missouri” that pastors were men only and of course heteros only. Doubtless Seminex’s dean and president were aware of more subcultures, as for example when they went to bat for one of our students down at the city jail. Seems he’d had the *chutzpah* to grow his marijuana on the window sill of his apartment in full view of passersby. One day the police passed by and noticed his garden. We all learned about that subculture in the morning newspaper.

Although Seminex was quasi-officially committed to HCM in Biblical studies, the same was not true for the LGH we were pursuing in systematics. That was true already while we were still at Concordia. Partly responsible for that could have been the three (yes, three) styles of Lutheran confessional theology represented by the department. The four systematics profs who were loyal to Synod President Preus did their confessional theology with the theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy as their key to the confessions. [“Orthodoxy” is the name given to German Lutheran theology in the century following the death of Luther.] Bertram and I used Luther’s own theology as our key to the confessions. Piepkorn took a third option, what I would call a “canonist” approach to the confessions. For him the confessions collected in *The Book of Concord* constituted the canon for Lutheran theology. Whatever the Lutheran confessions said on a given topic was what Lutheran theology was. Where the confessions were silent, a variety of options were possible. He relished tweaking Bertram and me by saying that the LGH was “one,” but not “the,” confessions’ proposal for how to read the scriptures.

With Piepkorn’s death shortly before Seminex happened, and with all the Orthodoxy-oriented systematians staying at Concordia, only one of those three came into Seminex. So for us LGH was the posture not only for studying the confessions but for systematic theology as a whole (see the citation from Bertram back in the prior post on “What is systematic theology?”). Seminex’s president and deans had been shaped more by Piepkorn’s perspective—beginning with their own student days at Concordia—than by the other two. Orthodoxy’s option was, to be sure, nobody’s choice. Bob and I sometimes were labelled as “Elertians” with our LGH and thus seen as not ecumenical enough within the world of Lutheranism.¹⁶ “There are other equally valid Lutheran theologies that we’re not getting from Bob and Ed” was the complaint. One year our LGH “narrowness” provoked a student initiative to “get different Lutheran voices into the systematics department.” The students pressing for this had already chosen their candidate from a good teacher they’d had at the Fort Wayne Senior College.¹⁷ Our

department—all three of us—officially went on record approving the idea, even the pre-selected candidate, but finances had the last word, and it never happened.

One of the students leading that movement, now a respected international theologian himself, still wonders if systematic theology at Seminex didn't really support the American religious establishment, and that what Bob and I have been doing since then, e.g., in Crossings, is but more of the same.¹⁸ Who knows? Among the Seminex faculty Bob was respected as a different-from-Piepkorn confessionalist, but he never made many converts in my judgment. I myself was the systematist from the farm, an image I doubtless fostered, and given my feisty ways, never very diplomatic, I, too, made no faculty converts. But with students Bertram and I did make a difference—Bob with the egg-heads, and I with the students from Prairietown and Peoria.

My evidence for this is that Bob and I (and a couple of colleagues who sometimes voted with us) were the losers on every crucial vote [four specific ones in Seminex's ten years, by my count] taken in the faculty where the theological basis for our actions was at stake. These were times, I still think, when the New Testament image of exile that Doc Caemmerer had shown us was up for grabs. At those times Seminex's ellipse with its two foci tilted toward becoming "Two Seminexes." Not one-after-the-other, as some folks thought when comparing Seminex at the beginning (1974) and Seminex farther down the road, but two side-by-side—from the outset—as the two midpoints of our theological ellipse tugged with each other.

The people representing these "Two Seminexes" in my scenario were the administrators—all of them, curiously enough, alums of the LCMS Bronxville, NY, prep school, and (therefore?) high-church, urbane, savvy, cultured Easterners—plus the exegetes on the faculty (and their student following); and the systematics department (and its student following). Because Bob and I were eventually 2/3 of the entire systematics department staff, our LGH confessional theology touched (some said "was inflicted" on) most all students.

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. So 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 four crucial issues, the majority of students voted with us on the “losing” side in the faculty.

Next time I intend to revisit those four crucial votes.

Peace & Joy

Ed Schroeder



Assembly of students and faculty around the famous Luther statue as they prepare to leave the Concordia Seminary campus



Students and faculty leaving the Concordia Seminary campus



Crosses for each faculty and staff member
fired by the Board of Control



PART SIX

Four Crucial Votes

Thursday Theology #14 (August 20, 1998)

The last paragraph of my prior post 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 four 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.

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, Professor 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 (à la Luke 21:14-15): "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 signaled in terms of the crunch situation in which we chose it.

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. For example, 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 October 12, 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 preexile 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."¹⁹

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 righthand 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."²⁰ 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 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.”²¹ 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.²²

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 (à la 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, *deo volente*, faculty reductions and closing shop in St. Louis.

Peace & Joy

Ed Schroeder



PART SEVEN

Faculty Reductions / Closing Shop

Thursday Theology #15 (August 27, 1998)

My last post concluded: “That’s two of the four [name change and internal governance] episodes where I think we strayed from our exilic calling. Next time, *deo volente*, faculty reductions and closing shop in St. Louis.”

FACULTY REDUCTIONS

Seminex began classes on Feb. 20, 1974, with something like 450 students and 45 faculty, a 10-to-1 ratio. The May commencement that year depleted the student numbers by one-third. Finding new students was a priority agenda item. In the “old days” back at Concordia Seminary student recruitment was no big deal. New ones came automatically—through the pipeline.

The Missouri Synod’s educational system for pastoral training—a half dozen junior colleges regionally spread throughout the USA, whose graduates then moved on to a two-year “Senior College” in Fort Wayne, Indiana—had always brought 150-plus new seminarians each autumn to the St. Louis seminary with little or no effort on the part of the seminary. But when we became Seminex, and thus “un-kosher” for students in Missouri’s educational system, that pipeline was turned off, and we had to scramble on our own. Initially a fair number of the Senior College graduates, ignoring the synod’s sanctions, did come our way, but their numbers diminished fast in subsequent years.²³

We all became recruiters in some fashion, and some new students came our way on their own, both those with Missouri roots and those without. One example of the latter was Harriete Baggett, Roman Catholic wife and mother (maybe even grandmother), deeply involved in social ministry in the St. Louis archdiocese. The local Roman Cath-

olic seminary was closed to her, of course; so Harriet signed on with us. Why? “So I can get my M.Div. degree,” she said, “and be ready for ordination when the rules change in Rome.” You can imagine what leaven such Harrietes added to classroom give-and-take.

But even with the addition of many blessed outsiders, after three commencements ('74, '75, '76) our numerical decline demanded attention. Also demanding attention was a decline in financial support. But what sort of attention? What was the demand to be read from the numbers?

The Seminex board read these numbers to be demanding staff reduction, and so did many of our faculty and students. The board asked us to assess the “optimum and minimum teaching and administrative faculty, executive staff and supportive staff by which the work of the school could be carried on,” and to do so with two scenarios in mind: if student body numbers stayed around 300, and also if they should drop to 250. Both student and faculty member classes heard them saying: “there must be reductions. You decide how much and who goes.” A few of us challenged the “must” in the board’s directive. If the New Testament image of exiles heading for a homeland up ahead somewhere really was the truth about us, how could we ever say to anyone: time for you to leave the pilgrimage now and head out on your own? If it was “only” money, and “only” shrinking student body statistics, wouldn’t lowering our salaries and branching out for other teaching venues be another option in keeping with the image of a pilgrim band? Tossing some of the marchers overboard can’t possibly be grounded in the gospel, can it?

Here I think Tietjen’s theology of institutions willy-nilly carried the day. Although he fought to keep the number of those set adrift to a very few, the board finally overruled him and authorized pink slips for 12 staffers. That constituted one-third of the faculty. At its regular spring meeting a day before the 1977 commencement it terminated seven colleagues and put five “on waivers.” Apparently the board thought we understood this as one possible outcome. We did not. Though the board’s decision was made just hours before the commencement and its atten-

dant hoopla, the news was not publicized until after diplomas were granted. The effect was shattering to everyone in the community. The shock generated such expressions as “the May massacre,” “Seminex’s suicide.” Expressed in Tietjen’s own retrospective words: “doing to ourselves what all the forces marshalled against us had not been able to do to us: close Seminex.”²⁴

How did it happen? Although the board initiated the process and called the final shots, we really did do it to ourselves. Before long we no longer challenged the “must” in the board’s view of reductions. We set aside our exile-model for this issue, and saw it as a problem of arithmetic: too many staffers, not enough students, not enough funds. No one disputed that the Lord had marvelously brought us thus far, and could surely be trusted to provide, but we nevertheless proceeded as though on this one we had to take our fate into our own hands. It still seems insane to me that we even went one step farther to apply triage to ourselves, categorizing ourselves—A, B and C—according to our judgment of each person’s value for Seminex. If you are all pilgrims in Christ’s exilic parade how can you even do that? Could be that Grandma Schmidt who sweeps the classrooms is Christ’s key agent for our pilgrimage. But we did divide ourselves, like Caesar’s Gaul, into three parts: Category A were those staffers absolutely necessary; category B were those one-step down from that—very important but not absolutely necessary; category C were those “who would be counseled and helped to find ministry elsewhere.”

When it was all over, seven wound up in category C and five in category B. The board’s action made it official. Tietjen’s job was to inform each of these twelve later in the day when the commencement festivities were over. A president’s job is not a happy one. And “there was no joy in Mudville” as word of this “strike out” spread to the rest of the Seminex community. Worse than that, it was chaos. Students had already gone home, so only the faculty was around to deal with the uproar. At subsequent meetings the board heard our protest against their perceived draconian measures. They did decide to offer contracts to the five staffers in category B. But since, as they said, we had offered them no “new mathematics and new wisdom” to alter the fate of the seven category C

colleagues, that action stood fast. It was our own failure. We failed to transmit to the board the “wisdom” of exilic theology so they could see the non-sense, even unfaith, of jettisoning fellow pilgrims. So that left only the mathematics, and those numbers couldn’t be fudged.

I said above that Tietjen’s view of institutions—and therewith his version of two-kingdoms theology—carried the day. The board must have had the same perspective, although I have no documentation to verify that. Expressed in the words of one board member: “sometimes you just have to do what is shitty to be faithful in your God-given calling.” Tietjen’s own epilog to this trauma in his *Memoirs* is more sophisticated, but the perspective is the same. The “institution that is essential for the church’s ministry is also inimical to it. That was a hard lesson for an organizational person like me to learn. Institution is not neutral but is predisposed to evil. Each institution is pervaded by the principalities and powers against which Christians wrestle. Institution is a part of what it means to be human, and it participates in the fallenness of our human condition. Institution dehumanizes, perpetrates injustice, and opposes God even when it is in the best of human hands, even when it is in the hands of Christians. . . . At Seminex, preserving the institution required that we tell some of our faculty and staff that they could no longer work with us in the community they had helped create. Institution requires the compromise of integrity.”²⁵

I think this pessimism about institutions is one that is often ascribed to Luther in American theology. But really its roots lie in Ernst Troeltsch’s (mis)reading of Luther’s two-kingdom paradigm. That view of Luther’s 2KP gained a following in America, I suspect, via the Niebuhr brothers, who had learned it from Troeltsch. Tietjen may have picked it up from the Niebuhr heritage at Union Seminary in New York while doing his doctorate there. But it was also present in the neo-orthodoxy that many of us “Missouri” seminarians inhaled in the 1950s when we started reading “forbidden books” on our own and found them such a refreshing alternative to our own Franz Pieper heritage in systematic theology.

No one who had ever read Luther’s treatise “On Secular Authority” could designate institutions as such necessary evils, and still claim

Luther's support. Luther says it is Anabaptist, not his theology, to label institutions as "predisposed to evil" and "pervaded by the principalities and powers." His claim is that institutions are God's good creations, not demonic at all. In that treatise his aim is to show the crown prince (soon to be ruler of Saxony) that God is gifting him with an institution the exact opposite of one that "dehumanizes, perpetrates injustice, and opposes God." Luther even makes bold to say that the Christian prince is one who can indeed make it happen so that the institution humanizes, perpetuates justice, and serves God.²⁶

But this theological perspective was a minority voice, as I've said in earlier installments, in Seminex. Though students found it winsome by virtue of their classroom exposure, only a handful of faculty moved from Troeltsch-Niebuhr to the real Luther on this one. And whether it ever got presented to the board I don't know. When they told us that they'd heard "no new wisdom" from us to alter their decisions about staff reductions, I imagine we were getting their answer. This two-kingdom theology and Scripture's own exilic theology did not commend itself to them as the need of the hour.

This self-inflicted wound to the Seminex community has no happy end, as far as I can see. Of course, it is "practical" to sever seven staffers when mathematics dominates the paradigm. But Gospel-grounding offers a variety of different options. Even good "left-hand" kingdom praxis has other possibilities. The departure of our seven colleagues was "required," it was said, to preserve Seminex as an institution. It can also be seen as an ironic big nail in our institutional coffin, whose lid came down six years later when we closed shop in St. Louis.

CLOSING THE SHOP IN 1983

Institutional pessimism continued. At the same time as the board was coping with the aftermath of the staff reductions in 1977-78, they authorized (ordered?) us to revise our internal governance. Here the MBO model (management by objectives) described above in the second crucial vote in my prior blog, moved in and replaced our 2KP "*regula*" for life together, another measure to preserve our institution that put

another nail into the coffin. The theology of the Letter to the Hebrews became even more relevant, for like those ancient Christians we were on the verge of burnout on our exilic pilgrimage. But we grabbed for coping mechanisms from the landscape through which we were marching. We didn't hear much good news coming from the voice of the Author and Finisher up ahead of us on the trail.

For some the prospect of the church merger coming over the horizon, which eventually became the ELCA, looked like the homeland where our journey was to end. Thus Seminex's merging with other existing seminaries in other church bodies, the ALC and LCA, looked like ecumenical heaven. After our history of Missouri separatism you can understand that it did look celestial—even with our institutional pessimism still around. Many of us faculty were tired, just plain tired, of having to do so many other things to keep Seminex afloat besides doing our teaching. So to have our calling restored to being “just” profs must surely be the oasis at the end of the line, right?

The process was long and complicated and replete with institutional politics of every sort. For one reason we were a plum ripe for picking with a constituency that contributed upwards of a million dollars each year to keep us going. Who wouldn't want to “merge” with us? You can read the tale of the zig-zag negotiations with ALC and LCA seminaries and bureaucrats in Tietjen's *Memoirs*. It is a narrative with strange analogs to Tietjen's own years on the ramparts within the Missouri Synod.

I was privy to none of the inside stuff, and as the merger-mania unfolded a few of us 2KP folks pushed for an alternative. That was in some way to take Seminex into the new merged church intact as a fully operational seminary, but different in many ways from the standard institutions that all the others were—owning no real estate, receiving no subsidy from church headquarters, functioning internally and externally on this exilic theology, etc. But we were probably deceiving ourselves and not seeing that Seminex, despite its many “strange and wonderful” features, had pretty well become a “normal” institutional seminary on its own. Nevertheless the issue was debated internally beginning already in 1979. In one preliminary vote four of the faculty member class and a large percentage of the student member class voted

against the merger in favor of an alternative that would continue an intact seminary to be offered to the new church. But the handwriting was on the wall. In May 1983 we graduated our last class. Faculty were deployed (that was our technical term) to three new venues: “ABC,” that is, the LCA and ALC seminaries in Austin, Texas (A), Berkeley, California (B), and Chicago (C). The faculty took up their duties there for the fall term. We’d already forgotten the grim meaning those three letters (ABC) had had in the days of our near suicide. A handful of the faculty didn’t deploy for different reasons. I was one who stayed in St. Louis to pursue Crossings. Seminex students—those not tied down in St. Louis—also moved in the ABC directions to continue their education.

Seminex in St. Louis was history. Did it end with a bang or a whimper—to use St. Louis-born T.S. Eliot’s alternatives? Probably neither. The final ceremonies were a mixture of joy and sorrow, the latter especially for our feisty St. Louis supporting constituency. And for many among the faculty, another sound was heard—a sigh of relief.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder



Seminex Students in Dining Hall



Robert W. Bertram and students



John Tietjen leading class



AFTERWORD

Kurt K. Hendel

The Crossings Community is to be commended for collecting and sharing Edward Schroeder's remembrances with a wider ecclesiastical and public audience. His interpretative recollections provide keen insights into specific Seminex events and the theological meaning and ecclesiastical implications of those events. His remembrances are also admirably consistent with his theological convictions. My intention in this Afterword is to engage Schroeder's perspectives and to share my own reflections on Seminex and its heritage. I do so with the recognition that shared experiences often impact those who share them in different ways. Thus, the same experiences can inspire differing or at least differently nuanced remembrances and interpretations. My comments are indicative of that reality.

I believe that most of the Concordia Seminary faculty members, staff, and students who joined the exodus from the seminary on February 19, 1974, agreed with Schroeder's perspective that the departure from Concordia was an exile rather than a "walkout." This is certainly how I interpret this event. It is also likely that many who joined the exilic journey expected, or at least hoped, that the exile would be temporary since they still viewed the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) as their ecclesiastical home and sought its reform and renewal. At least initially, the exile was, therefore, a time of looking back and of longing for the past. However, it soon became apparent to the members of the Seminex community that our exile was God's invitation to look ahead to the future home God was preparing for us. We expected, therefore, that our exile would be a transitional period of relatively limited duration until God welcomed us to this new home where we would be free to pursue God's mission in ways that were faithful, effective, and pragmatically feasible and responsible. As the years passed, we also became convinced that our new home should include new denominational siblings who were willing to partner with us in our vocational pursuits and who would share with us the new home that God had provided.

The formation of Seminex was a liberating experience for faculty, staff, and students. We were convinced that our new seminary community was a gift of the Holy Spirit who led us into exile so that we might continue to pursue our callings. Witnessing Christ was at the heart of our vocation as we shared God's gracious, radical, and emancipating gospel. Scriptural interpretation and theological instruction that were shaped by the Law-Gospel hermeneutic and the historical critical method; faithful and creative preaching in which Law and Gospel were consistently yoked and also carefully distinguished; the fostering of liturgical renewal; the affirmation of a shared governance structure in which students, faculty, and board had equal voice; and the nurturing of community were persistent priorities during our Seminex years. Our preaching, teaching, and serving were all viewed as opportunities to make a faithful witness during a crucial time of confession. Christ was our inspiration and example, and our faith, nurtured by the Gospel, freed us to pursue the mission that God provided. That mission also included the fostering of an ecumenical spirit among Lutherans and the larger Christian family. Therefore, we were grateful for our unity with other Christian siblings, particularly our Jesuit and United Church of Christ colleagues and friends who shared their educational facilities with us and, thereby, facilitated our continuing ministries. We were also eager to support the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) when it invited the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) to consider an ecclesiastical merger. This invitation eventually led to the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) on January 1, 1988. A commitment to the quest for justice in the church and the world was another aspect of our Seminex mission. It was apparent particularly in our celebration of the ordination of women by Lutheran church bodies in the U.S. and our eagerness to help prepare women for rostered ministries in the church, in our support of the civil rights movement, in our welcoming of LGBTQIA+ students, and in our continuing opposition to the war in Viet Nam. These were the chief foci of our mission as an academic and faith community.

Schroeder notes that the "theology of Seminex" was an "ellipse with two centers," namely, the historical critical method and the Law-Gospel

hermeneutic. I share that perspective. The theology that emerged from these two centers was rejected by the LCMS as teaching that cannot be “tolerated in the church of God” and as “gospel-reductionism.” However, the Seminex community insisted that its theology was faithful to Scripture since it affirmed the dialectical nature of God’s Word and focused particularly on the Gospel as the primary hermeneutical key of Scripture and of the Christian tradition, as the Holy Spirit’s means of creating faith, and as the ultimate witness of the centrality and necessity of Christ. The exegetical and constructive theology courses taught at Seminex, which were characterized by the use of the historical critical method and informed by the Law-Gospel hermeneutic, certainly helped shape the theology of Seminex. However, the other curricular offerings were formative as well. The affirmation of the liturgical renewal movement evident in the worship courses, the Law-Gospel preaching taught by the homiletics professors and modeled consistently in the seminary chapel worship services, the catholicity of the Christian faith and of the Lutheran confessional heritage as well as the rich history of the church clarified in historical courses, and the mission theories and practices of the church catholic explored in the mission offerings all contributed to the theology of Seminex and, thus, helped form the identity of the seminary as well as the content and purpose of its mission.

Schroeder highlights four challenging and controversial decisions that the Seminex community had to make, namely, the name change, the form of its internal governance, staff reduction, and deployment. I will address three of these decisions. From my perspective, the name change was neither theologically nor institutionally problematic. Schroeder suggests that going to court over the name change would have been an opportunity to make a public confession, and he regrets that this was not done. However, one can also argue that Christians going to court against fellow Christians is not biblically defensible and would have served as a negative witness, both within the community of faith and beyond. Striving to retain the Concordia name would also have reflected an exilic understanding that looked back rather than forward. Such an understanding would have contradicted Schroeder’s and the whole Seminex community’s vision of our exile as an anticipation of God’s future. It is also important to note that the name change was not only strategically and practically warranted, but it was, in fact,

a much more effective and faithful public confession than engaging in a legal battle to retain the use of the name Concordia Seminary. After all, by changing the seminary's name to Christ Seminary—Seminex, the members of the seminary community declared publicly that they diligently sought to be persistent and devoted Christ confessors. They could not have made a more faithful public confession.

The staff reduction was a much more challenging decision than the name change because it raised crucial ethical, theological, and communal questions. This decision particularly impacted seven faculty colleagues emotionally, spiritually, and vocationally. They had served both the LCMS and Seminex faithfully and had been founding members of the latter. As a result of the seminary's decision, they were now compelled to search for other ministries so that Seminex as an institution could survive. While the seven colleagues were impacted most directly and profoundly, the decision also affected the students, staff, and faculty colleagues who remained part of Seminex and who experienced pain, disappointment, shame, anger, and a clear sense of loss. Schroeder's critique of the decision is an incisive and defensible one. At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the practical realities that Seminex faced at the time, namely, a shrinking student population, minimal placement opportunities for graduates, and the obvious need for responsible stewardship of limited fiscal and institutional resources. Institutions are obviously human creations, and they consist of fallible and finite human beings. They are, therefore, inevitably affected by sin and human limitations, and their survival often requires ambivalent and morally challenging decisions, like the one that Seminex made.

Unlike Schroeder, I view the decision to deploy Seminex faculty, staff, and material resources in 1983 as a positive, defensible, and necessary one. It was readily apparent to most members of the Seminex community that the seminaries that welcomed us and the anticipated ELCA were the home that God had been preparing for us. The deployment was also consistent with the seminary's and the AELC's ecumenical commitments, and it provided the opportunity for a more extensive impact of Seminex's mission. Serving God and God's people with partners who would share our new ecclesiastical home also enriched both Seminex and, I trust, our welcoming seminaries.

Was the Seminex mission curtailed or did it even cease when its faculty, staff, and material resources were deployed in 1983? Schroeder clearly struggled with and opposed the deployment. Indeed, he chose not to participate in it. He was convinced that the seminary's mission could be pursued most effectively if Seminex remained an independent institution located in St. Louis. I remain convinced that the deployment was the final step on our exilic journey which transitioned us into our new home, thereby making the continuation of the Seminex mission not only a possibility but a reality. It is, of course, a statement of faith to claim that the deployment marked the culmination of our community's exilic journey. However, I believe that the subsequent North American Lutheran ecclesiastical history confirms the validity of that faith statement. As the remaining faculty members entered their new homes, they were able to continue to exercise their vocation as Christ confessors in partnership with Lutheran Christian siblings. Seminex students were able to enroll in the seminary of their choice, and their placement into future ministries became more certain. By God's grace, Seminex's mission was, therefore, expanded and enriched. In February of 1974 none of us knew precisely what future God was preparing for those of us who chose exile rather than continuing ecclesiastical conflict and confrontation. During the subsequent years of Seminex's existence, most of us recognized that the Lutheran communities in the United States, specifically, the Missouri exiles who became the AELC, as well as the ALC and the LCA, did not need another seminary to prepare future leaders of the church. Furthermore, the Seminex community's ecumenical identity, its commitment to be a responsible steward of the resources that our supporters shared with us, and the limited ministry placement opportunities for our graduates convinced many of us that our continuing educational mission as an independent seminary was no longer warranted or feasible. We hoped, however, that our mission would continue. Most of us were also supportive of the AELC's invitation to our ALC and LCA siblings that we become a united ecclesiastical community, even as it was clear to us that such a union would have implications for Seminex's institutional future. Conversations regarding a potential deployment of Seminex's students, staff, and faculty were initiated in 1979, and they culminated in the agreement that in 1983 nine faculty colleagues would be deployed to the Lutheran

School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC); four to Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS); and two, together with the library holdings, to the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest (LSPS). President Tietjen and a group of administrators continued to shepherd Seminex as an independent institution until December 31, 1987. On January 1, 1988, when the ELCA became a reality, the deployed Seminex professors became faculty members of the three institutions where they were already teaching. At that point, the Seminex administrators pursued other ministry opportunities.

The deployment did not mean, however, that the mission of Seminex had concluded. Rather, most of the faculty members considered it to be a continuation of that mission, although now in partnership with sister seminary colleagues. At LSTC, each of the Seminex professors was named a “Christ Seminary—Seminex Professor” of the particular academic discipline that the professor taught. Our passion for the Gospel, our appreciation for the Law-Gospel hermeneutic and for the historical critical study of Scripture, our love for the liturgy and for the vast treasury of sacred music, our respect for the Lutheran confessional heritage and the theological insights of Martin Luther, our ecumenical focus, and our desire to promote justice in the church and the world persisted. Seminex graduates also continued to pursue their faithful ministries as pastors, bishops, deaconesses, academic theologians, and synodical and church-wide ecclesiastical leaders. Seminex’s vocation thus continued to be carried out in diverse areas of the church’s life and mission. Since this was accomplished in partnership with other seminary communities and since it also helped shape the identity of those communities, the Seminex heritage and vocation continue even to this day.

That this is the case is a blessing because the confessional witness that was Seminex’s calling remains and must remain the crucial mission of the church in the present and in the future. This mission is, in fact, pursued when the Law-Gospel hermeneutic continues to be operative; the contextual, scholarly study of Scripture remains a priority; and the diligent historical and theological exploration of the catholic tradition continues to clarify God’s plan of salvation, the purpose of God’s saving acts, and the absolute necessity of Christ. The empathic but also critical engagement with contemporary scientific, philosophical, societal, and

intellectual insights promotes a creative dialogue between the Gospel and contemporary societal contexts, fosters new insights into Scripture and the church's tradition, and facilitates a relevant and transformative witness of Christ in the church and in the world. Every historical moment is a time of confessing for the community of faith, and the Gospel remains God's ultimate and relevant word addressed to all human beings in and through the ministry of the church. The Seminex story is a persistent reminder of these crucial realities. To our gracious God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and forever.

Kurt K. Hendel



A class in progress

ENDNOTES

¹ Hebrews 11:13-16; cf. Richard R. Caemmerer, “No Continuing City: A Memoir of Change toward Deepening and Growth in Jesus Christ,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 5 (October 1978): 270–315.

² Cf. Robert W. Bertram, *A Time for Confessing*, ed. by Michael Hoy (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008; republished in Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017). Schroeder will himself give an overview of times for confessing in “Part Two: Augsburg 1530/Seminex 1974.” The reference to *satis est* (“it is enough”) is from AC 7 (Latin text).

³ “To the Ends of the Earth,” 60th Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, July 11-17, 1998.

⁴ “Ever Only All for Thee,” 50th Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, New Orleans, Rivergate, July 6-13, 1973; cf. “Religion: Battle of New Orleans,” *Time* (July 23, 1973); cf. also Frederick W. Danker, *No Room in the Brotherhood: The Preus-Otten Purge of Missouri* (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1977).

⁵ One of the more immediate contributing and significant events may have been the election of Jacob A.O. Preus as eighth President of the LC-MS (1969-1981). Cf. “The Edifying Word,” 48th Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Denver, Currihan Exhibition Hall, July 11-18, 1969. Following Preus’ election, the LC-MS began a conservative reversal of the policies of his predecessor, Oliver R. Harms.

⁶ Cf. *Faithful to Our Calling, Faithful to Our Lord; An Affirmation in Two Parts - Part I. A Witness to Our Faith: A Joint Statement and Discussion of Issues, Part II. Personal Confessions*, Faculty of Concordia Seminary, 1972. Cf. also below when Schroeder explores this in detail in “Part Four: Seminex’s Own Theology.”

⁷ SD, Preface, 9.

⁸ <https://www.lcms.org/about/beliefs/doctrine/statement-of-scriptural-and-confessional-principles>; cf. also Edward H. Schroeder, “Critique of President Preus’ Statement,” Presentation to LCMS Northern IL District Pastoral Conference, Oct 16 & 17, 1973, <https://crossings.org/critique-of-president-preus-statement/>.

⁸ Cf. John H. Tietjen’s own accounts of this and other experiences in his *Memoirs in Exile: Confessional Hope and Institutional Conflict* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Martin Luther, “On War Against the Turk,” *LW* 46:155-205.

¹¹ Cf. AC 7, Latin text.

¹² The reader was published in-house in 1974, and is regrettably now out-of-print. Nonetheless, the Crossings Community has represented this book on line: <https://crossings.org/library/schroeder/the-promising-tradition/>.

¹³ In “Robert C. Schultz’s response to the Gay/Lesbian Ordination Resolution,” Thursday Theology #7 (July 2, 1998), Ed wrote: “Bob [Schultz] was indirectly linked to Seminex, I say, though some may dispute that. He may even dispute it; I’ve never asked him. That all depends on what one thinks Seminex really was. My take puts Bob in a “godfather” role. After sem graduation he went to Erlangen Univ. in Germany—on Jaroslav Pelikan’s recommendation—and there learned how to do “Law and Gospel theology without the verbal inspiration hangup.” Did his doctorate on the role of the “L&G” axiom in Lutheran theological history, came back into the LCMS a couple years later and started the “L&G;” reform movement within the LCMS as a prof at Valparaiso University (VU). That reform movement is itself worth an essay or two, maybe even a book someday. Suffice it to say for now that VU in the late fifties was where “L&G” theology was happening. Bob Bertram was already on the scene there, I joined a bit later. By presidential edict a department of “theology” replaced “religion,” and a new undergraduate curriculum came to be. The three of us were the junta (others say cabal) that put the pieces together. Nowadays it’s called “Crossings.” The lingo of “L&G” was old hat in the LCMS. Missouri’s founding father Walther had made it the fundamental hermeneutic for theology and practice in his seminary teaching. In later Missouri, however, it became a “doctrine” that was then added to the list of other “true” doctrines—to be believed and taught. Schultz jarred LCMSers—within his own English District, and from that base elsewhere in Missouri—by restoring “L&G;” as a hermeneutic, and then putting it into practice vis-a-vis the manifold confusions of L&G; in our denomination. He’s been doing it ever since, subsequently in the LCA from several venues, and still in retirement from Seattle as you’ll see below. In the ’60s and early ’70s that tradition, i.e., the distinction between Law and Gospel is a hermeneutic, not a doctrine, eventually gained prominence at Concordia Seminary, not only with Bertram’s and my appearance on the seminary scene, but also through the increasing flow of VU graduates who came to Concordia as sem students. In the year that Seminex happened there were more “Valpo” students in the seminary student body than there had ever been before, many in student leadership positions. They were articulate “L&G;” theologians in the student deliberations that lead to the moratorium, that led to..., that led to..., that eventuated in Seminex. Schultz doesn’t know that I’m doing this preface to his piece. Depending on whether or not he’s had breakfast, he may not be amused when he sees it. But willy-nilly he’s a piece of Seminex’s history. When I get back (next week, d.v.) to some more Seminex memoirs, I hope to touch on the L&G hermeneutic in the mix there.”

¹⁴ Cf. Robert W. Bertram, “On the Nature of Systematic Theology,” <https://crossings.org/systematic-theology/>.

¹⁵ Cf. Robert W. Bertram’s theological commentary on the occasion of Piepkorn’s death entitled, “Piepkorn in Perspective,” in “Viewpoint,” Missouri in Perspective 1:5 December 24, 1973, <https://crossings.org/piepkorn-in-perspective/>. It should be noted that on that very same day of Piepkorn’s death, Bertram issued a memorandum to his fellow faculty and staff colleagues. Schroeder later reproduced that memorandum, and offered it with this blog (“A Bertram Memorandum. Another Artifact from Seminex Days and the Wars of Missouri,” <https://crossings.org/a-bertrammemorandum-another-artifact-from-seminex-days-and-the-wars-of-missouri/>) about Piepkorn’s

death and speaking of the irony (even confessional irony) of what all happened on the very same day: “The item below is this week’s find in the Bertram papers. The context is this: In the summer of 1973, Missouri Synod convention delegates declared the “faculty majority” of Concordia Seminary (later to become the Seminex faculty) to be false teachers “not to be tolerated in the Church of God.” The newly-elected Seminary Board of Control was instructed by the convention to implement this resolution. The board’s first move was to declare the oldest five of this group, all over 65 years of age, “honorably retired or transferred to modified service.” If I remember aright these colleagues were R. Caemmerer, A. Piepkorn, A. Ropp, and L. Wuerffel.

When the news of this action hit the campus, Bob Bertram went to his typewriter (no computers then) and sent this memo around to all the rest of us “intolerable” ones. The deep irony is that on that very day—I think it was a Friday—as Bob was composing this, one of those five, Arthur Carl Piepkorn, was walking up DeMun Avenue to the nearby barber shop to get a haircut. He died of a coronary in the barber’s chair. After his death, his widow, Miriam, said:

“They thought they could retire him. God took care of that.”

Bob himself was only fifty-two in 1973 and thus escaped the forced retirement purge. But already then he’d become the avuncular interpreter to us about what was really happening. You’ll see for yourself in what he says below. A Personal Memorandum

13 December 1973

To: My Brothers and Sister in the Faculty Majority and Staff

From: Robert Bertram

1. The saddest thing about our present synodical administration is that it is silencing the Word of God.
2. The way our synodical administration is silencing God’s Word is by silencing those who teach that Word.
3. These teachers have been speaking the Word to our synodical situation, and that is why their Word of God is being silenced.
4. Not only in the Synod’s classrooms is the Word of God being silenced, but also in the Synod’s pulpits.
5. But those who are doing the silencing prefer to conceal their motives, for fear that people might see what really is being silenced: not just preachers and teachers but the very Word of God.
6. What is encouraging in all this is that with each new silencing of the Word, the Word seems to be getting a better hearing than ever before.

[Bertram’s further exposition on these six points:]

1. The saddest thing about our present synodical administration is that it is silencing the Word of God. The saddest thing about this administration is not its political intrigue, its power-plays, its “speaking out of both sides of the mouth,” or even its personal

cruelties and persecutions, shameful as all these are. What is sadder still is the way the Word of God in our midst is more and more being put to silence. Less and less does the Word have free course for the joy and edifying of God's holy people.

2. The way our synodical administration is silencing God's Word is by silencing those who teach that Word. This happened again recently at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, when the Board of Control scheduled another group of professors for removal. But the same thing is happening on other synodical campuses as well, and will be happening more and more. Teachers of the Word are being silenced and, with them, so is the Word they speak.

3. These teachers have been speaking the Word to our synodical situation, and that is why their Word of God is being silenced. It is a shoe that fits. What is being silenced is not the Word of God in the abstract, the Word in some academic classroom lecture, the Word in technical theological discussions. No, the Word of God that is being muzzled is that Word of His which applies to our own synodical sins. God's Word of Law has been exposing the creeping legalism in high places. So that Word now gets condemned as "rebellion." And God's Word of Gospel has been trying to replace the legalism. So now that Word, too, must be discredited — by labels like "wishy-washy," "reductionism," "permissive." As soon as the Gospel is made relevant, it is seen as meddling. What is being silenced in the Synod is not the Word of God in general but the Word which strikes close to home.

4. Not only in the Synod's classrooms is the Word of God being silenced, but also in the Synod's pulpits. Many pastors are being inhibited from speaking out. For a pastor to speak a Word of prophetic criticism against oppression in his own church body has now become, for him too, a risky thing. For him to free his people to do something about that oppression, especially when some of the people themselves may support the oppression, requires unusually heroic Gospel preaching. As a result many a preacher's conscience is being tried, and his people are being deprived. One pastor reports how a delegation from his congregation asked, "Pastor, why haven't you shared these concerns with us—don't you trust that we can handle them?" Even the Word from our pulpits is being silenced.

5. But those who are doing the silencing prefer to conceal their motives, for fear that people might see what really is being silenced: not just preachers and teachers but the very Word of God. That guilty secret is being disguised. Though more and more servants of the church are being silenced out of their pulpits and classrooms, the true reason for their removal—namely, the Word of God they have been speaking—is kept under wraps. Instead the pretext is that these men are simply not needed or that they are too old, or perhaps no reason at all is given. Those who are silencing them simply do not dare to accuse them openly of false doctrine. For such accusations would simply call attention all over again to the Word they speak. And that is what the Word-silencers fear most of all.

6. But what is encouraging in all this is that with each new silencing of the Word, the Word seems to be getting a better hearing than ever before. The very suppression of that Word emboldens those who speak it to speak it more openly, more relevantly,

more pointedly to the situation at hand. The same way with the people. The more they are being kept in the dark, the more they are turning out for meetings and movements and media which provide them the whole truth and a full Word of God. No sooner is the Word silenced forcibly in one place and it erupts spontaneously in two other places. When in recent memory has there been so keen and widespread an interest in God's Word for our synodical situation, whether His Word of judgment or His Word of promise, as there is right now? And nothing has fanned the flames of that interest as much as the current oppression. Precisely as we reveal how the Word is being silenced, we reveal the Word itself. That way the current problems of our Synod, even if they may never be solved, can at least be kept from going to waste. [13 December 1973]

¹⁶The reference to "Elertians" may be more accurately a term to describe Schroeder, who completed his doctorate under the German theologian Werner Elert (1885-1954). Bertram rarely cited or referred to Elert, even though he appreciated his insights and certainly studied his texts. Instead, Bertram referred to Luther. To be sure, the same primary influence of Luther applied also to Schroeder's theological orientation.

¹⁷James Childs is probably the candidate referred to here.

¹⁸Perhaps a reference to Paul Hinlicky. Cf. also Carl E. Braaten, *A Harvest of Lutheran Dogmatics and Ethics: The Life and Work of Twelve Theologians 1960-2020* (Delhi, N.Y.: ALPB, 2021), 221-244.

¹⁹Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile*, 221.

²⁰Cf. Robert W. Bertram, "Instrument for Internal Governance of Concordia Seminary in Exile," (published May 20, 2009), <https://crossings.org/internal-gov-sem-in-exile/>. The IGD was, of course, first used in Seminex's early years. Cf. also Tietjen, *Memoirs*, 271.

²¹Tietjen, *Memoirs*, 282.

²²Bertram's detailed exposition of DEXTRA can be found in his essay, "From Reflection to Responsible Living: Where Do We Go From Here?" <https://crossings.org/from-reflection/> It should be noted that in Bertram's presentation, there is some modest variance from what Schroeder has presented.

²³In fact, Concordia Senior College was closed by the LCMS in 1977 to prevent any further "pipeline" to Seminex. The property then became that of Concordia Theological Seminary which moved from Springfield, Illinois, to Fort Wayne, Indiana.

²⁴Tietjen, *Memoirs*, 281.

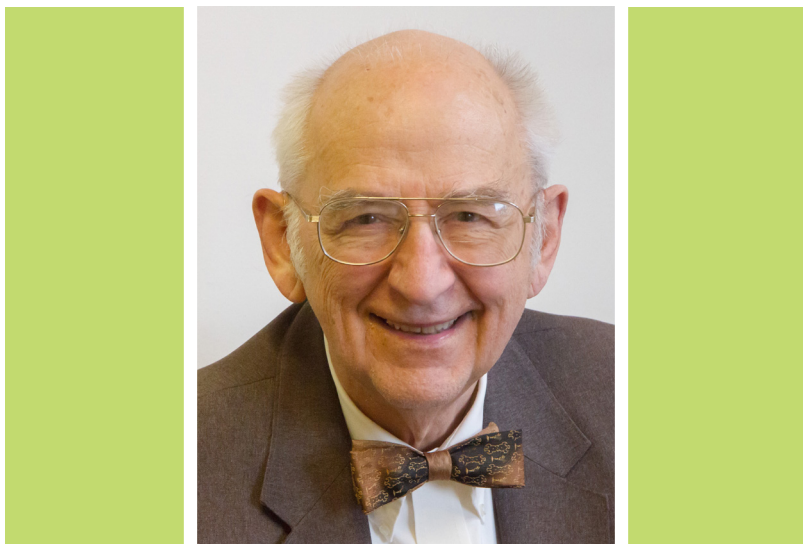
²⁵*Ibid.*, 283.

²⁶Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed, *LW* 45:75-129



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SEMINEX Remembered



Edward H. Schroeder

There have been many attempts to reflect and write on what all happened in the emergence of Seminex in the early 1970s. Most of these reflections have tended to focus on matters of personality, power, and institutions. We should not negate those reflections. But the genius of Edward H. Schroeder was his passionate desire to bring the thin tradition of the theology of the cross to bear upon all events, including his own experiences at Seminex. For Schroeder, and his lifelong colleague Robert Bertram, the Gospel was at stake, making this moment a time for confessing. These pages reflect Schroeder's profound conviction that the Gospel of Jesus the Christ shines upon this movement and our lives.



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