

## *is for Confessors Risking Outlawed Seminary (and Church) Status In the Name of the Gospel—Seminex.*

This special issue of the Crossings Newsletter is dedicated to the faithful gospel witness of those who were part of the promising tradition known as Seminex.

On February 19, 1974, about six hundred students and 45 faculty were exiled from the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The reasons for the exile reach back further into Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod history; and there is much history written about it. You can get a glimpse of it in the monumental works of some of those who lived through the experience to tell about it: John Tietjen's **Memoirs in Exile**, Fred Danker's **No Room in the Brotherhood**, and most recently Robert W. Bertram's **A Time for Confessing**. But you can still find others who lived through the experience who believe and affirm the joy of this confessing movement for the sake of the gospel of Christ crucified and risen, and will be glad to tell the story.

This year will mark the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Seminex. On June 23-25, 2009, (corresponding to yet another anniversary, the 479<sup>th</sup> of the Augsburg Confession), the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago is hosting a Reunion for Seminex students, faculty, and staff. Call Ruth Ann Deppe at 773-256-0700 for details. Y'all come!

When the exile took place, I was a student at what was once known as Concordia Senior College—another institution that was among the casualties of the Preus' purge in the mid-1970's. I remember visiting both the campuses of Concordia Seminary and Seminex, to "come and see" for myself what

would be the best choice for seminary education. The campus of Concordia Seminary had nothing to offer, except a barren, empty, cold reminder of what it might once have been: beautiful buildings, but no spirit to encourage one looking for the joy of Christ's promise.



*An early logo of Seminex by  
Prof. Robert Werberig.*

When I got off the elevators on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor of the Old University Club Building which Seminex called home, it was a different story. There was the thorny mural on the wall designed by Robert Werberig that artistically displayed the cruciformed identity of the seminary; and down the hall, in the commons, I could hear the sounds of joyous laughter and welcome. How strange, I thought, that those in exile should find more joy than those who inherited the campus with all its beauty.

On the opposite end of the 11<sup>th</sup> floor was the chapel where I had the privilege of worshipping on this visitation day. There the gospel was preached in all its promising power; the same gospel that was so integrated in both community life and classroom teaching. Here, in this gospel of Christ, was the true building block for life! In the hymnals were places to sign your name under the "cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1). I signed on to the confessing movement that day, and never looked back.

In this issue of the Crossings Newsletter, we are privileged to have the reflections of some of the professors and staff who were at Seminex on "day one." They are among the faithful "cloud of witnesses," and we hope you enjoy their confessing witness to the gospel even now.

*Michael Hoy  
Seminex '79*

## What Did/Does Seminex Mean?



Seminex meant knowing the question behind the question. Not whether Eve and Adam existed or whether Isaiah wrote all 66 chapters, but whether the gospel itself is enough.

Seminex meant keeping one's integrity. Truth is what counts, not tenure and pensions.

Seminex meant deep support from more conservative faculty colleagues who could have stayed behind.

Seminex meant the courage and generosity of lay people and pastors who supported us.

Seminex meant students who often surpassed their teachers in clarity of vision and decisiveness of action.

Seminex meant unbelievable ecclesial and academic hospitality in the early years from St. Louis University, Eden Seminary, and LSTC.

Seminex meant willingness to be deployed for the benefit of the whole ELCA, not preserving our own institution at any cost.

Seminex and the AELC meant seizing the moment by calling for wider Lutheran unity.

Seminex meant being warmly welcomed by institutions in Berkeley, Austin, and Chicago.

Seminex meant our students being welcomed into the LCA, ALC, and many Missouri parishes, and Seminex grads assuming leadership in the ELCA well beyond their numerical percentage.

Seminex means an openness to and participation in new gospel-related issues – ecumenism, diversity, and today's ethical challenges.

Seminex means affirming the gospel and serving in ministry in circumstances that require give and take, not institutional idolatry.

Seminex meant and means that we too are daily changed by baptismal renewal.

*Ralph W. Klein*

## Freedom



I simply had to join the group of seminarians, staff members and faculty colleagues who walked off the campus of Concordia Seminary in February, 1974. I am not suggesting that I was forced to participate in that faithful stroll. Rather, I was

free to do so because I had experienced the emancipating power of the gospel through the teaching and preaching of my seminary professors, whose colleague I had become just five months earlier. The gospel freed me to act in a way that I considered to be both theologically and ethically warranted.

This gospel is the radical good news that in Christ God has restored the divine-human relationship and now grants human beings the gifts of forgiveness, righteousness and wholeness solely for Christ's sake, by grace, through faith. It is the wondrous assurance

that believers are the blessed beneficiaries of God's radical gifts, without any merit or worthiness on their part. While this gospel remains a stumbling block to some and utter foolishness to others, it is God's gracious, trustworthy promise to humanity.



As the gospel describes and shapes God's relationship with us, it also impacts our relationships

with one another and with all of God's creation. That is the message of Martin Luther's marvelous little treatise **The Freedom of a Christian**. This work should be on the required reading list of all evangelical (in the sixteenth-century sense of that word) Christians. Indeed, it is one of the precious nuggets of Luther's theological corpus and of the whole Western Christian tradition because it is the Reformer's incisive description of the Christian life.

Luther's focus is on the wondrous blessings of the gospel and of faith. God creates faith through the proclamation of the gospel and, thereby, grants all believers radical freedom. Faith is our "Christian freedom" because it fulfills the Law, honors God by

considering God to be truthful and trustworthy and unites us with Christ. A happy exchange results since Christ takes on everything that we are and gives us all he has. We, therefore, become spiritual royalty and priests and enjoy divine freedom because all the powers that separate us from God, that imprison us and take away life are overcome. Hence, we live life *coram Deo* [before God].

The life of freedom in God's presence is, however, a life of service. That is the radical nature of Christian freedom. It is the freedom to serve since faith quite naturally manifests itself in works of love. Such works benefit us because, like the law, they enable us to discipline the flesh. However, the chief purpose of works is to serve God and the neighbor. Luther summarizes his vision of the Christian life in the following words: "We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love." (**The Freedom of a Christian**, 1520, LW 31,371) The Reformer thus proclaims both a radical, freeing gospel and a powerful, altruistic ethic.

This evangelical message was affirmed by the Seminex community as it carefully distinguished law and gospel, insisted that the gospel must be proclaimed boldly and faithfully and strove to be of service to the church and the world through its defense of the scholarly study of Scripture; ecumenical commitments; support of women's ordination; opposition to the injustices of war, racism and sexism; affirmation of the liturgical movement and promotion of global Lutheran unity.

The people of ELIM, of the AELC and of Christ Seminary-Seminex experienced the freedom of the gospel and sought to express their faith in loving service of the neighbor. Of course, the latter was ultimately not their doing. It was simply an attestation of the power of the gospel and of faith and a sign of God's gracious activity. The celebration of the Seminex anniversary is, therefore, another occasion to give God all honor and glory.

Kurt K. Hendel



## Anniversary Thoughts

As one looked down the pike when clouds loomed large over the Missouri Synod landscape, there was no need of a diviner's cup to discern that a perfect storm was brewing. From the moment that Dr. J. A. O. Preus received his welcome

from Concordia Seminary, it was clear that the meaning of 'church' as we knew it was in for a change. In his brief speech of acceptance of accolades he let it be known that it was time to "get the church off dead center." One side of me said, "Wonderful", but then I said to myself, "Wait, that's a political term. This means trouble."



And so it came to pass that a short time later I received a personal message from Dr. Preus inviting me to come to Chicago and share my ideas with a start-up committee for some synodical program. I politely declined, stating that it would not be good pedagogy on my part to be absent from the classroom just when the new academic year was to begin. From that moment I decided to do as Thucydides did and collect notes on the spot in awareness, as the majority of my colleagues and many allied members in the Synod sensed, that "this was to be a great war."

The reality became most shocking when one Easter day, as I was collecting some material at my office, I heard familiar voices emanating from Robert Preus' office. They were talking, heedless of anyone being in the building. I was taught from little on not to pry into others' business. Besides, they were annoying my concentration. So I went to the bathroom at the end of the hall, just outside their room, and flushed the toilet. But they went blithely on with their conversation.

Upon return to my office I did a sudden double-take. I heard the names of two colleagues, "Dr. Scharlemann" and "Prof. Kalin" and something about an

“investigation.” I took up a pen and wrote snatches of the conversation. Robert advised Jacob not to move on his own. It would be better to have someone else conduct it, and Scharlemann could raise questions about Kalin. About this time, while my own and their windows were wide open, Donna (I think I have the name right) Preus walked up on the grass and urged them to come home. And so they left.

Shortly thereafter I called Dr. Tietjen. He came to our home on Ridgemoor. I drove him around and told him the story and gave him my notes. He writes about them in his “Memoirs in Exile.” They constitute one of the most volatile indictments, minuscule though it may appear, in the history of ecclesiastical bureaucracy. Robert Preus tried to dismiss Tietjen’s story, but history will stamp Robert’s effort as one further instance of descent into the depths of one long tawdry period of misgovernment in the house of God.

In contrast to such who were deficient in character, my colleagues and all who joined in the objectives of Seminex became the powerful witnesses through whom newness of what it means to be ‘church’ came to fruition. The future will reveal whether we continue to be people of God in the Holy Spirit’s mission or masters of the art of displacing Jesus Christ with tawdry bureaucratic self-interest.

In the Gospels, the Passion story is much longer than the accounts of Jesus’ resurrection. Without the Passion, the Resurrection reduces to celebration of secular ology and the boast of having the Gospel lumbers along without “a true understanding of it.” This is what my collegial Confessors taught me at Seminex. My wife Lois, who heard a special call from the Lord on August 6, 2008, was frequently asked whether she felt unhappy about removal from the Missouri Synod fellowship. “No! We’re free!”

*Frederick W. Danker*



## Seminex. So?

Maybe we should have all stayed where we were. Maybe we should have made Preus and company

toss us out one by one. We were given that advice. It would have taken some time for them to do it. All those hearings, endless trials, witness after witness, all those lawyers, nonstop arguing.

We might have broken them up. They don’t get along with each other all that well, you know. We might have ground that whole almighty LCMS administration down a bit. Broke their bank. They would have had to scale back the big mission in New Guinea, get an equity loan on Concordia, St. Louis, closed CPH, refinance Concordia, Ft. Wayne. Hoo Ha!

No. We didn’t try to take them down. It was Satan’s own carefully crafted ‘eye for an eye’ temptation. We marched away that day with our honor intact, hoping the church would see our exit parade as a strong protest needing its attention.

We walked away. Our opponents heaved a great sigh of relief and began a delighted scramble to let us know who was boss, and make sure we never came back. “Do what we tell you, or clean out your offices and residences and get out!”

We swallowed hard, looked at each other and counted it to be a kind of release, one that left us trembling. “Free! Free at last!” was said by many with their hearts in their throats. We swallowed hard and got down to the business of preparing students for Pastoral ministry. ELIM, Eden Seminary and the Jesuits at St. Louis University mightily befriended us.

Seminex never got over these birthing pangs. Our student population got smaller, placement was difficult and could not be guaranteed. Some graduates became



Episcopal, some Methodist. Others became worker-priests. Others waited. Tenured faculty willingly surrendered tenure knowing that Seminex had a limited future.

Two things impressed us. Faithfulness and Courage. Never had we seen such communal faithfulness striving against our inborn, but realistic fears. Never had we seen such communal courage, such trusting in the Lord. These two were formative for anyone who was part of the Seminex community: Faithfulness and courage. We are grateful to have been a part of Seminex.

*Jeannette and Paul Bauermeister*



## Crossings and Seminex

Why a Crossings commemoration for Seminex? Seminex lasted for only ten years beginning 35 years ago and closing a quarter century ago after ten graduation classes. What's the connection? Well, they are

linked hip and thigh in several ways. Some of which are chicken-and-egg sorts of connections – not exactly clear as to who generated whom.

Looking back from today, Crossings is a primary place (THE primary place?) where the distinct Lutheran confessional theology of Seminex is still on the scene. Like Seminex in its day, it's an outsider to Lutheran denominations, margined from so-called "mainline" Lutheran churches – not just institutionally, but theologically. Locating Lutheranism's center in the "Augsburg Aha!" about how to read the Bible and from that how to read the world is a minority opinion, a "thin tradition" in Lutheran churches – both in the USA and worldwide.

The claim that Crossings perpetuates the theological legacy of Seminex is disputed by other Seminex goldie-oldies. [Tidbit: About half of the original Seminex faculty are still alive.] The majority opinion is that the hullabaloo that created Seminex was about the so-called "historical-critical method" for reading the Bible, not Luther's own proposed law-promise Aha! for doing so. So the post-history of Seminex is still under discussion.

What about Seminex's pre-history? Who's the chicken, who's the egg? The tripwire event occurred on January 20, 1974. On that day John Tietjen was suspended as president of Concordia Seminary by the official board for allowing some of the faculty (no names ever given) to teach "opinions . . . not to be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended." Although I didn't know what action they intended to take, we all knew that something was going to hit the fan in the aftermath of the Missouri Synod's convention a few months earlier where the citation above was applied to the "faculty majority" currently teaching at the seminary. Most of us incriminated ones expected the ax to fall on the most suspect of us in the faculty – namely, the profs teaching Bible and the two "recent add-ons" in the systematic theology department – Bob Bertram and Ed Schroeder.



Anticipating that our heads were on the block, we often talked about what to do when some or all of us were "put out of the kingdom." The grand finale of these conversations came exactly two weeks before the ax fell on Tietjen's neck--that means January 6, 1974 [Epiphany!]. We, "the usual suspects," gathered for a lengthy evening meeting to bring our own concrete proposals for what we might do if/when we were sacked. Bob Bertram presented a 7-page Magna Charta. Its opening lines were these:

"Crossings, Inc. (Saint Louis): A Proposal / Robert W. Bertram [Epiphany 1974] / What? To establish Crossings, Inc. – or whatever its name should be – an institute for theological transactions in people's secular callings, training clergy and laity together." [For the full text, see the Crossings website: [www.crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org), click "Library" and "Works by

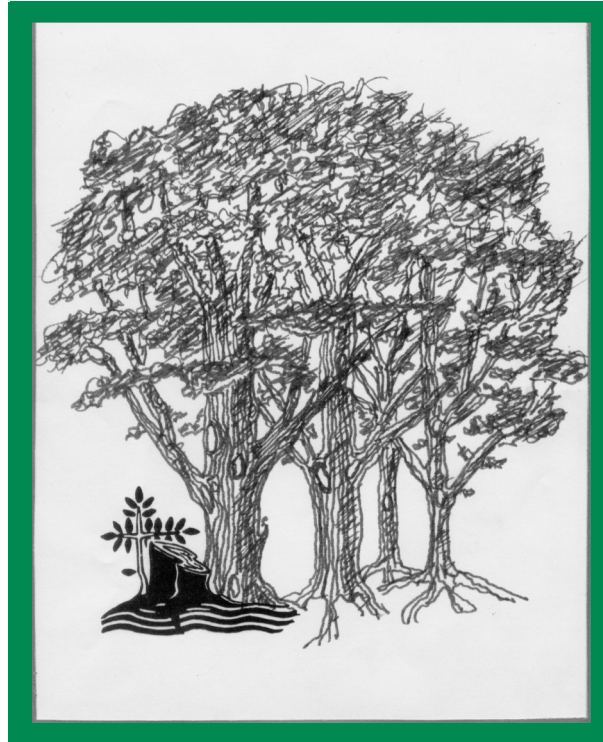
Robert W. Bertram” to find “Crossings, Inc. (St. Louis): A Proposal.”]

The events following Tietjen’s suspension – so far as I know – didn’t follow anyone’s expectations. For the students injected themselves into the fray. At least the seminary board, I’m sure, never ever thought about the students becoming active players in this event of Missouri’s church politics. Installing a “kosher” acting president (who happened to be my brother-in-law) immediately after they suspended Tietjen, they must have anticipated “business as usual” – or at least not **too** unusual – in the days that followed. First of all from the faculty, though there too, they must have been mad. How could we follow the leadership of the one who had been our major critic, possibly even the one who engineered the “not to be tolerated” condemnation at the church’s national convention?

They must have thought that if the faculty was held in line, so the students too would follow suit. No problem. But they didn’t know the students. So the students – both serpentine and dove-like – gathered to do something on January 21. Their conclusion: since unnamed false teachers had not been reined in by President Tietjen, they the students, now officially apprised of the dire dangers in the classrooms, chose not to attend any seminary classes until the false teachers were named. Thereupon the students would boycott those false teachers and attend only the classes of the true teachers. How could the seminary board – or the new acting president – expect any thing else?

And with that the seminary was closed down for business as usual. There was no walk-out. The students – completely ignored in everyone’s calculations and, I am convinced, the faculty’s thinking too

– brought the whole shebang to a halt. Brilliant! After which everybody scrambled – we the accused, the seminary board and its acting president, and most of all, the synod’s leaders who had thought they had everything orchestrated. The students mucked up everybody’s best-laid plans.



*At its’ first graduation, Martin Marty took the Seminex logo of a tree stump with new growth and expanded it into a forest—the future of Seminex.*

One month later at the next Concordia Seminary board meeting they fired the faculty majority for not accepting the acting president’s leadership. The Seminex that then arose didn’t follow Bob Bertram’s earlier “Crossings” blueprint. Bob’s proposal was designed for a handful of us expected to be booted out as major trouble-makers, but not the whole shebang.

Instead Bonhoeffer’s “underground” seminary in Germany became a precedent – outside the box, confessional, communitarian, directly linked to congregations. But before long the systematics department at Seminex – yes, Bob and Ed – was offering Crossings-style courses for seminarians AND laity brought in from the outside. When Seminex then closed shop in St. Louis in 1983 – and most of the Seminex faculty and all the students deployed to three other seminary campuses of the upcoming ELCA – Crossings Inc. already existed and slowly opened the throttle for what it has now become. Seminex and Crossings.

Which one was the chicken, which one the egg? That may be a moot question. Which one still exists doing “Seminex theology” is not.

*Edward H. Schroeder*

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