

That all changed in the fall of 1983 with the arrival of Seminex - nine faculty members plus Paul Manz, the majority of its students, President John Tietjen, and four administrative staff. The name "Seminex" stands for "seminary in exile." Seminex began in 1974 as a result of a conflict in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod between the faculty of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and Jacob Preus, the president of the synod. Preus campaigned for the presidency on the promise that he would get rid of all liberal tendencies in the Missouri Synod, particularly at its seminaries. He accused the St. Louis faculty of false doctrine, of using historical criticism in biblical interpretation, and of violating the principle of sola Scriptura. Preus got the Board of Control to suspend the seminary president, John Tietjen. The students and the faculty walked off the campus in protest, and set up a seminary in exile at an off-campus site. The LSTC faculty was sympathetic with the cause of the Concordia faculty. Since Seminex was not yet an accredited school, LSTC offered to grant diplomas to its first class of graduates.

Eventually the conditions for the survival of Seminex were such that they needed to look for other options. A final decision was reached to disperse the Seminex faculty to seminaries of the Lutheran Church in America. The majority were assigned to LSTC, and a few went to Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. I was involved in the negotiations led by President Bill Leshner and Dean Frank Sherman at LSTC. Offering hospitality to Seminex seemed like the churchly thing to do. Naturally we had some worrying questions about the effect the coming of Seminex would have on LSTC. Our faculty was being asked to welcome ten new faculty members all from the same ethnic group. The administrations of the two seminaries gave the LSTC faculty the proper assurances to relieve any doubts that its members might have had about the coming of Seminex. Who would pay for this influx? Seminex would, we were told. They would raise a million dollars annually to pay their own salaries and all of the overhead. What would be their teaching responsibilities? Their faculty members would teach courses in the core curriculum as needed, plus seminars in their respective areas of specialization. When a vacancy would occur on the LSTC faculty, a nationwide search for a successor would be undertaken, with the stipulation that a member of the Seminex faculty would be eligible for consideration. It seemed like a fair deal.

Sad to say, none of the assurances were met. In due course Seminex became part of the LSTC family. The annual support of a million dollars was diminished with each passing year. All the Seminex faculty merged into the LSTC faculty, with one exception. The Seminex professor of homiletics, David Deppe, was discontinued on charges of homosexual promiscuity. He left his wife

with five children for a male partner. The irony is that some members of the Seminex faculty - I do not know how many - later expressed support for same-sex partnerships, maintaining that the biblical prohibitions to homosexual behavior under certain circumstances are not relevant to the contemporary discussion.

The end result of the merger of Seminex and LSTC faculty was a radical transformation of the ethos and modus operandi of the school. Members of the Seminex faculty were all of German background. Most if not all had attended Missouri parochial schools from kindergarten through college and seminary. They were all intelligent and well educated, with an impressive work ethic. Together they had weathered the storm of heresy charges in the Missouri Synod, and they stood together as brethren leading a confessing movement in a contemporary church struggle. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was frequently quoted. As likeminded minded colleagues, they formed a voting bloc strong enough to dominate the political process of a small faculty. Soon the day-to-day administration of LSTC was firmly in their hands. The old guard at LSTC was marginalized. Frank Sherman was replaced as dean by Ralph Klein. Bob Conrad took over the doctor of ministry program. Kurt Hendel became chairman of Division Two, Church History and Christian Theology. These things happened not because of any conspiracy, but simply because of the personal competence and energetic leadership of these Seminex colleagues.

The unexpected consequence of such a strong contingency of Seminex personnel was to move the faculty and student body to the left on social, cultural, and theological issues. Having been condemned as liberals and heretics in their home church, they became advocates of progressive agendas in their new ecclesial setting. The poison of political correctness spread into every aspect of seminary life. The LSTC practice of having social gatherings exclusively for faculty members and spouses was changed to include nonacademic staff - secretaries, janitors, and kitchen help. Committees on every conceivable matter were expanded beyond the faculty to include an equal number of students and staff. The cult of egalitarianism drove out every remnant of elitism. Orwellian shades of 1984 had arrived: we were all equal, but some were "more equal than others." This was not unilaterally the work of the Seminex faculty; the entire faculty was involved in contributing to the transformation of LSTC into a modern Protestant seminary, hospitable to the many isms of American culture.

The theology that backed up the "paradigm shift" at LSTC was either antinomian or a close relative. Robert Bertram and Edward Schroeder were founders of Crossings, an educational

Carl Braaten, *Because of Christ: Memoirs of a Lutheran Pastor-Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010)

institution whose purpose was to relate the gospel to daily life. Both were greatly influenced by the law/gospel theology of the German Lutheran theologian Werner Elert of Erlangen University. They followed Elert in rejecting the third use of the law. Elert maintained that the title of Article VI of the Formula of Concord, "Third Use of the Law," mislabeled what it really affirmed. The question was debated among first-generation Lutherans whether the law applies to regenerated Christians; that is, whether they are to live in obedience to the Ten Commandments.

The first use is the public law that everyone must obey or else face the punishment. The second use is the law that accuses and leads to the knowledge of sin. The third use is the law that shows believers how to order their lives. Do Christians need the guidelines of the third use of the law, or is the gospel sufficient of itself to provide moral guidance for the Christian life? Traditionally Lutherans have affirmed the necessity of the third function of the law; even the saintliest believers are sinners who need to be guided by the moral wisdom enshrined in the laws and commandments of God. Many modern Lutherans have set aside the third use; thereby, they have jumped from the frying pan of legalism into the fire of antinomianism. The ideology of Crossings moved in a straight line from the rejection of the third use of the law to the support of the gay/lesbian agenda that has since taken the ELCA by the throat. Does the gospel by itself offer any rules or restrictions regarding the sexual behavior of Christians? To say that it does is to legalize the gospel, that is, to make the gospel of God's love and forgiveness do what the law is designed to do. Antinomianism is thus pernicious in theology and the church, not only because it truncates the law but also because it subverts the gospel. We will never know what would have happened to LSTC if the merger with Seminex had not occurred. Was it a mistake for LSTC to bring Seminex on board? Would it possibly have been better for all the churches involved if the dissenters had remained within the Missouri Synod and carried on their struggle there? If they were truly confessors for the sake of the gospel, as some of them claimed to be, what is the meaning of their confession once they have run away from their Missouri oppressors? In any case, the presence of Seminex was so powerful and far-reaching in its effects that LSTC was radically transformed in the process. This is merely the opinion of one faculty member who taught at LSTC for thirty years.

Note: LTSC: Lutheran School of Theology Chicago

Carl E. Braaten. *Because of Christ: Memoirs of a Lutheran Pastor-Theologian* (Kindle Locations 1531-1560). Kindle Edition.

Carl Braaten, *Because of Christ: Memoirs of a Lutheran Pastor-Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010)

Lessons Learned?

- Was it all theological or was it all political?
 - While theology is primary, it is not singular
 - While other matters are crucial, theology is central
- Projection is real – what you claim others are doing is often exactly what you yourself are doing
- Simple answers can cloud real issues in the complicated interplay of theology and history
- It takes purposeful and sustained effort to understand what your opponents are actually saying
- Personal relationships rather than abstract principles can sometimes drive actions
- The deeply convicted and engaged are 1) few; and 2) only remain so as long as the issue they are interested in is on the table
- Catch phrases are nice, but they often don't 1) capture the complexity of a movement or historical event; 2) lose their focus and change their meaning over time
- We still don't understand why things changed so quickly in the LCMS

Source: Lawrence Rast, *Seminex at 50: Lessons Learned and Still to be Learned*, Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne Symposia Series 2024, 17 January 2024.

Recommended Reading

Exodus from Concordia: A Report on the 1974 Walkout. This volume, produced by the Concordia Seminary Board of Control, details the events and includes many primary source documents.

Marquart, Kurt. *Anatomy of an Explosion*. First published in 1977, this volume looks at the conflict from a theological viewpoint.

Danker, Fred. *No Room in the Brotherhood: The Preus-Otten Purge of Missouri*. Danker is a member of the faculty majority which walked out. Published in 1977, this volume reflects his experience.

Adams, James E. *Preus of Missouri and the Great Lutheran Civil War*. Adams, a religion writer for the Post-Dispatch, discusses the role of JAO Preus in the conflict. First published in 1977.

Tietjen, John. *Memoirs in Exile: Confessional Hope and Institutional Conflict*. In these memoirs, published in 1990, John Tietjen shares his side of the story.

Paul Zimmerman, *Seminary in Crisis: The Inside Story of the Preus Fact Finding Committee*. Published in 2007. Zimmerman was a member of Preus' Fact Finding Committee. This volume recounts his time on the committee and includes many of the transcripts of interviews with the faculty majority.

James Burkee, *Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod: A Conflict that Changed American Christianity*. Published in 2011, this volume looks at the conflict in light of secular politics at the time.

Schurb, Ken (editor). *Rediscovering the Issues Surrounding the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout*. Published in 2023, this is a collection of essays regarding other issues involved in the 1974 walkout.

Rast, Lawrence. *Exile or Walkout: A Historical Narrative of the 1974 Crisis at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*.