



THE SEMINARIAN

VOLUME XXIV

April 25, 1973

Number 21

IN HONOR OF DR. BELA VASSADY

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

BORN: Arad, Hungary, December 30, 1902, son of Louis & Margaret Vassady; Father was superintendent of education in Hungary

MARRIED: Serena Nagy, Halmi, Hungary

CHILDREN: Naomi, 1934; Bela, Jr., 1938; Timea, 1939

EDUCATION: B.D.(cum laude), Central Theological Seminary, Dayton (1924); Th.M., Princeton, 1925; Th.D. (summa cum laude), Debrecen University, Hungary; Diploma of Privant Docentship, Debrecen, 1932; Additional study in Vienna, Berlin, Leipzig, Paris and London.

ORDAINED: Cleveland, Ohio, 1924.

HONORS: Essay on "The Psychology of Faith" won him a 2000 German Reichsmark prize in the Kant Gesellschaft (Berlin, 1931); Fellowship, Lilly Foundation, study in Germany, 1959-1960

PROFESSIONAL CAREER: Supply Pastorates--Buffalo, N.Y. & Debrecen, Hungary; Professor of Education & Philosophy, Papa, Hungary (1925-28); Professor of Systematics, Sarospatak, Hungary('28-34); Professor Systematics, Univ.

of Debrecen (1934-48--was for two terms Dean of Divinity Faculty, President of the Theological Faculty, '44-48); Guest Professorships held at McCormick Seminary, Chicago; Princeton Seminary; Fuller Seminary, Pasadena; University of Dubuque and its Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, 1947-52. Professor of Systematic Theology, Lancaster Seminary, 1952-present.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES: Society of Reformed Theologians in Hungary, founder and 1st Pres.; Reformed Ministers Association, Hungary, Executive Secretary; Ecumenical Council of Churches, Hungary, Executive Secretary; Official delegate to the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences (1937), and to the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Amsterdam, 1948; Accredited visitor, Second Assembly of the World Council, Evanston, 1954; Official delegate to the General Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System, Geneva (1948); Princeton (1954), Sao Paulo, Brazil (1959), Frankfurt (1964), Nairobi, Kenya (1970).

PUBLICATIONS: Editor, Theology and Life, 1958-1965; and three major works in English: The Major Traits of Calvin's Theology, 1952; Light Against Darkness, 1961; Christ's Church; Evangelical, Catholic, and Reformed, 1965.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

It is with great humility that we present this issue of THE SEMINARIAN in honor of Dr. Vassady. His influence on the lives of a generation of seminarians, pastors and laymen cannot be adequately summed up in an expression of thanks or praise. So, THE SEMINARIAN has taken the time to prepare this special issue to express this community's deep gratitude to one of the men of the ages. We wish for Dr. Vassady the fullest and best excitements in his years of retirement--may God give to you as richly as you have given to us!

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

April 16, 1973

Dear Dr. Vassady:

Through the thoughtfulness of Mr. Brad S. Lutz, the President has learned that you will retire this year as Professor of Theology at the Lancaster Theological Seminary of the United Church of Christ.

The President wishes to join with your many friends in extending warmest greetings and congratulations to you. You can indeed look back with pride and satisfaction on your outstanding contributions in the field of theological education over the past 48 years and, with the enclosed card, the President sends best wishes for health and happiness in the future.

Sincerely,

David R. Gergen

David R. Gergen
Special Assistant
to the President



*With warmest admiration and gratitude
for the long years you have given to
the education of America's youth.*

Richard Nixon

FROM THE DENOMINATION...

"It gives me great pleasure to join with Bela Vassady's friends and colleagues in celebrating his long and fruitful years of service to the church and to theological education. When he joined the Seminary faculty in September 1952, he brought to it a perspective that was different (here I speak of his background in Europe), intensely ecumenical and Reformed. He also brought with him years of engagement in the theological task and a deep involvement in theological education.

"Over the years since that time that perspective has broadened significantly as he has reflected theologically on the American experience. In this connection I particularly remember his sermon in Santee Chapel following the assassination of President Kennedy. His commitment to ecumenism has never wavered. The sign of that is his volume Christ's Church: Evangelical, Catholic, and Reformed, now regarded as a major contribution to the corpus dealing with the Consultation on Church Union. These lines from the concluding prayer of the book vividly reveal his ecumenical concern:

"Gather us, Lord, or scatter us;
do as Thou deemest right,
building us all into one Church...

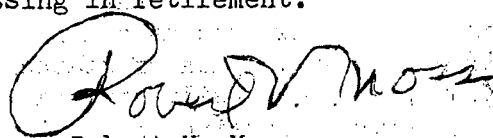
Thou, who has formed Thy Church,
come, and reform it again and anew."

"As I look back over our years together as colleagues on the Seminary faculty, I am especially grateful for the leadership he took in establishing and editing Theology and Life. He showed himself to be not only a good editor but an able administrator. Few of us dreamed that such a journal could attract either the readership or the authorship that it did. He is a visionary who can give concretion to his dream.

"Finally I want to express my gratitude for him as a teacher. In those first years we were together on the faculty our offices adjoined each other. I was working on my doctoral dissertation and he was always busy on his next book. It is not difficult to imagine how often the occasion arose for one of us to read something the other had written and then to discuss it. In those conversations he was my teacher, not just because we dealt with issues in his field but also because he was always eager to compare notes with me on a passage of Scripture.

(cont'd. next column)

"Bela Vassady has served the church well. I wish for him and Serena God's richest blessing in retirement."



Robert V. Moss
President
United Church of Christ

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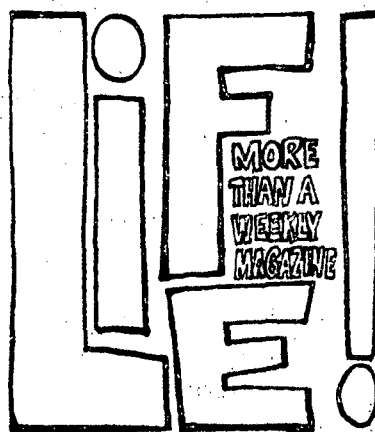
FROM A THEOLOGICAL COLLEAGUE...

"Dr. Vassady brought the riches of the Reformation tradition to a generation of Lancaster students. In a time when temptations to faddism and adventurism in theology were strong, both Bela and Serena were good stewards of basic Christian belief. As editor of Theology and Life, Dr. Vassady also served as enabler of an important wide-ranging theological conversation in the 1950s and 1960s. Together with his stewardship of classical theology, his editorship and ecumenical impact, I shall remember him as a generous and understanding senior colleague who began my seminary teaching career by assigning me the Christology course in the Systematics field. He knew very well that those who are inclined to build ramparts had better have solid foundations.



Gabriel Fackre
Professor of Theology
Andover Newton Theological School

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FROM A FACULTY COLLEAGUE...

"Life erodes and reveals what lies at the core of a man's personality.

"After the erosions of many years, Bela Vassady lies exposed as a man of deep personal faith, a man of staunch convictions, one not easily stampeded by the rumble and roar of passing theological fads. He is gentle and warm and approachable; he has won and preserved an enviable inner freedom and a robust patience with himself and with those whom he serves.

"Consistently over the years and perhaps more frequently in the last two years, I have heard Professor Vassady praised by his students. For he is a working theologian, alert and active, always encouraging his students to join him in his quest for God--a task he pursues with enthusiasm and yet in fear and trembling.

"Thus exposed by time's erosion, Dr. Vassady stands revealed as a man of considerable presence and authority, a man in whom God's grace has long been at work. He is in my opinion an authentic Christian. I cherish him."

W. J. Walsh, S.J.

William J. Walsh, S.J.

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FROM A STUDENT...
AN EDITORIAL

One of the first persons I heard about at LTS before my arrival here was Bela Vassady. Feelings about him were, of course, mixed in their content, but I looked forward to my study in theology with him.

Theology always scared me. I thought perhaps it was nothing more than "religious philosophy"--and, seeing what my worst college grades were in philosophy, I shuddered at the thought of it under the guise of theology. It was not long, however, until I lost my fear in Dr. Vassady's class. Here is a man who is able to make theology live -- and to make speak to the everyday life that we must live. The "existential theologian" and the "pilgrim theologian" are concepts that are worthy of every Christian's consideration. In other words, Dr. Vassady takes theology out of the realm of pure speculation and puts it into the concreteness of life.

While there are probably other professors of theology who do the same thing, Dr.

Vassady's approach is backed up by the record of his life. For him, theology must be concrete-- as his awareness of the presence of God stems from their life together. In today's world there are many times when it is hard to believe--but knowing a man like Bela Vassady, and knowing his life story, is enough evidence in some of those difficult times.

I recall Dr. Vassady saying once that theology and life must never be separated. And I believe there is no greater example of this than his own life, which is his theology. Dr. Vassady represents for us many things: a well educated theologian, a sensitive and gentle man, a concerned teacher and educator. But above all he is and remains, what he calls his only qualification, and M.D.V.--a minister dei verbi, a minister of the Word of God.

To you Dr. Vassady, we all wish the very best in the years that lie ahead. Your impression on our lives and in our hearts will always narrow the distances that we may be apart. Godspeed!

Brad S. Lutz

Brad S. Lutz, editor

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STAFF FOR THIS ISSUE

Editors: Brad S. Lutz

Tony Szilagyi

Student Body Editor: Dennis A. Moritz

Proofreader: Barry M. Lohman

Assembly: Steve Gifford, George Heberling

NEXT ISSUE: Thursday, May 3 -- this will be the last issue for the year.

Deadline is Wednesday, May 2, 12 noon.

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COMMENCEMENT SCHEDULE

Baccalaureate, Thursday, May 24, 1973

Dr. Bela Vassady, preacher

Alumni Day and Commencement, Friday, May 25

11am - commencement,

Dr. Seward Hiltner, speaker

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ARTS FESTIVAL!!!

Remember the Arts Festival is NEXT WEEK, May 1 & 2. If you have not returned a slip to participate you may still do so. The evening programs will be reversed in hopes that the new organ will be completed for a Wednesday night recital.

THROUGH ECUMENICAL GLASSES

(Dr. Vassady's famous lecture is reprinted here with his permission from Theology and Life, Volume I, Number 1, February 1958).

When the World Council of Churches was still in process of formation, as a member of its Provisional Committee I was invited to visit its headquarters and to attend the first post-war meeting of the Committee held at Geneva in February, 1946. The invitation reached me in my native country, Hungary, under Russian military occupation.

After many months of "string-pulling" and waiting, the Russian exit permit was finally granted. Now I had to solve one final problem, how to cross the iron curtain? On the streets of Budapest I met an American army officer, and asked him to provide for me the necessary transportation. There and then, while we were both absorbed in conversation, a Russian military truck hit us. Both of us were injured, and an ambulance took me to a hospital. I was hospitalized for ten days. But as soon as I could walk again, the American Military Mission made it possible for me to leave Hungary on a military plane. That small plane carried only seven passengers: six American G.I.s and one Hungarian professor of theology!

In five hours we were in Paris. From there I went to Geneva where the leaders of the World Council welcomed me as the lost sheep that was found again. (I was only six months late!) They immediately inquired about my personal needs. "I can think primarily of one item," I replied. "When that truck hit me in Budapest I broke my glasses, and I could not get another pair." Within a few hours I was furnished with a new pair of glasses. And because they were a gift of the World Council of Churches, I have called them my ecumenical glasses ever since.

In 1946-1947, while on a speaking tour here in America, I always enjoyed telling the congregations of the various denominations that even though I was a native of a small European country, yet, by the providence of God, I was able to look at them through ecumenical glasses. By that I meant to say that I had learned to observe and appraise everything in the perspective of the universal Church of Jesus Christ. In jest, yet earnestly, I have been wishing but one thing for all my hearers: that, without benefit of a baleful truck they might also be furnished with a pair of ecumenical glasses, since there will be no peace and mutual understanding on this earth until we all learn to view the problems of the world not only through national and denominational, but definitely through ecumenical glasses.

A year later, I felt the need for an appointment with my eye-doctor. Having examined my eyes he advised me to exchange my glasses for bifocals. First I felt like a speaker who had lost his story. Woe unto me, I thought, my ecumenical glasses were gone! But then I looked deeper into the theology of the Bible, and especially into that of the Apostle Paul, and soon became aware of the fact that ecumenical glasses have to be bifocal.

Or do not the Scriptures refer to the church in a bifocal perspective--as the local congregation and as the church universal? And so I started to tell my hearers the old story in an amplified, new version, teaching them that the ecumenical Christian must develop a bifocal outlook on the church. On the one hand, he must try to solve all the concrete problems affecting Christ's world-wide church in his own local setting--his community, church and nation. On the other hand, while so doing he must always bear in mind that his handling of these local problems has to serve Christ and his whole universal Church.

All this happened a decade ago. But the lesson of this story never seems to lose its actuality and timeliness. "Nothing is real unless it is local," taught Chesterton. But it is equally true that the local realities can be rightly viewed and appraised only in the perspective of the universal. And what else could be more concrete as well as more universal than a bifocal outlook through a pair of ecumenical glasses?

But one might rightly raise the question: "How about trifocal glasses? Are you not biased when you identify the perspective of, what could be properly called, local ecumenicity, with that of a bifocal outlook? Does not rather the mere existence of your own denomination serve as a proof for the necessity of a trifocal outlook?

Trifocal glasses are usually worn by persons who need not only their near and distant vision corrected but also their intermediate vision. Should we not then likewise say that a sound and correct denominational focusing of our spiritual vision simply helps us to get a total and clear picture even of the intermediate parts of the Church Ecumenical?

(continued other side)

ECUMENICAL GLASSES--continued

And that without such a focusing we may get easily lost either amidst the many bushes of our local congregational problems, or in the remote and impersonal vagueness of the Church Universal?

But what assurance can you have that your denominational focusing is really sound and correct? Do not our intermediate, denominational lenses very often rather play the role of blinkers? Are we not too well acquainted with cases of denominational selfishness, jealousy, and self-righteousness, or with the varying patterns of denominational inferiority and superiority complexes? Was not the Japanese evangelist, Kagawa, at least partly justified, when once he said while touring America: "We are not interested in your damnations--I mean, denominations!"

Then again, when we speak of the World Council of Churches, should not its very name elicit in us not only joy but also dissatisfaction? We can certainly rejoice in the knowledge that in the World Council God has granted us "a fellowship of Churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour." At the same time, however, we must be appalled at what Karl Barth called the "horrible plural" in the Council's name. Everytime we utter this name (or the name of the National Council of Churches) we must be aware of an uneasy question mark written across it. Indeed, Christ has but one Bride, therefore it is not only unecumenical but downright ignorant to pray--as was done by an American pastor, though with the best intentions--that God might bless the Churches, the Brides of His Son! As if Christ would be practicing a sort of polygamy all over the world! And as if Paul had spoken of "pure brides" and not of "a pure bride" when describing the Church (II Cor. 11:2)!

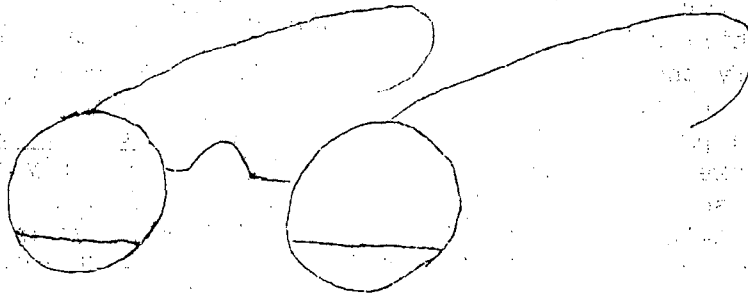
The denominations (or "Churches"), just like the Councils of Churches, must then be regarded only as temporary expedients in our Christian communal life. And the more we adjust ourselves to the bifocal outlook of the genuinely ecumenical (and that means, Biblical) glasses--because there are not churches in the sense of denominations mentioned in the Bible!--the more shall we be enabled to clear away the blurs caused in our Christian vision by our unorthodox orthodoxies and confessional self-sufficiencies.

The spirit of true ecumenicity can take root only in repentant denominations, and "the true hope of the ecumenical movement is that it may be the place where churches find penitence." We must learn that "repentance to salvation" should be a compelling urge not only for individual believers but for the denominations as well. "All of the existing confessions have to die into unity," said one of the conference speakers at Edinburgh in 1937. And at Amsterdam William Robinson who served as liaison officer between the press and the discussion groups exclaimed: "We have come here that all of our churches may die--not die out, but die!"

What shall we say then? Should the trifocal perspective of the church be entirely dropped by us and give way to a bifocal outlook? I think, the right answer to this question is both a "No" and a "Yes."

It should be a "No" since the members of the local congregations are, and ought to remain within a denominational context, and thus a certain denominational focusing is unavoidable. On the other hand, we must give also a "Yes" answer to the same question because the soundness and correctness of this denominational focusing can be secured only by constantly readjusting our sight to the bifocal perspective of the genuinely ecumenical glasses.

Ecumenical glasses then, in the ultimate sense of these words, must be and always will remain bifocal glasses. And only such a bifocal perspective will enable the great historic denominations to apply again and anon Paul's words to themselves as "Churches": "For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (II Cor. 4:11).



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

I am grateful to Brad Lutz for the opportunity to make the following announcements in the pages of the Seminarian. While they are "official" announcements, I welcome the occasion to discuss these matters at greater length than is possible in the Announcements.

To: MEMBERS OF THE SEMINARY COMMUNITY
From: JAMES D. GLASSE, PRESIDENT

A. Faculty Appointments

1. I am pleased to announce that the Board of Trustees has acted to elect the Reverend Francis E. Ringer as Assistant Professor of Theology for a three-year term effective September 1, 1973. This action was taken by a mail ballot of the Board upon recommendation of its Educational Affairs Committee, following a vote by the Faculty requesting this action.

A detailed statement of Dr. Ringer's background and experience is available in the form of a news release prepared by the Seminary for distribution to the press. Copies of that are available from Mrs. Payne. Let me say just this much for your information at this time.

Dr. Ringer is a native of Pennsylvania, and an honor graduate of Franklin and Marshall College. He has pursued graduate study at the University of Pennsylvania, and received the B.D. degree from Lancaster Theological Seminary in 1950. He has subsequently earned additional graduate degrees from Temple University: S.T.M., 1957; M.A., 1970; Ph.D., 1972. He has served churches in the Penn Central and Pennsylvania Southeast Conferences of the United Church of Christ, has been Executive Director of the Philadelphia Cooperative Ministry, Vice President of the Philadelphia Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, and is currently Chairman of the Division of Church, Parish Life, and Mission of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference. He has had, in addition to his extensive parish experience, service as a teacher at Kutztown State College while serving as pastor of St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Kutztown, Pennsylvania since 1967.

Dr. Ringer brings real strength to our faculty that we need at this time. He has both varied and extensive parish experience. He has excellent academic training. And he has a concern to relate theological education to the training of effective parish clergy. We welcome him to the faculty and look for his leadership in the area of Christian Ethics and in other aspects of our educational program.

2. I am also pleased to report that a Search Committee has been organized to seek a replacement for Professor Achtemeier, who will resign from our faculty in order to accept appointment as Professor of New Testament at the Union Theological Seminary in Richmond. This committee has already located some outstanding candidates for this post, and will interview them on April 24 and 26. Watch for times and places for interviews with faculty and students. It is our intention to have a professor of New Testament on the scene in the fall.

When Professor Achtemeier's appointment is officially announced by the Union Theological Seminary, I am releasing the following statement on behalf of the Seminary as an expression of our appreciation and respect.

When asked to comment on Professor Achtemeier's appointment as Professor of New Testament at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, Dr. Glasse, President of Lancaster Theological Seminary said:

We are, of course, sorry to see Professor Achtemeier leave Lancaster. Biblical studies are the keystone of our curriculum and, as Professor of New Testament, he has made a major contribution to the development of Lancaster Theological Seminary as an institution of distinction, and his scholarship has earned him a national and international reputation. His leaving is a loss to Lancaster.

Dr. Achtemeier goes to Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, a sister institution in the Reformed tradition, where he will have an increased opportunity to continue his research as part of a large faculty and to work with post-graduate students.

Mrs. Achtemeier, who has served as adjunct Professor of Old Testament, has made a unique contribution as a teacher in the Seminary and in local churches. Her leaving is also a loss to the Seminary and the community.

A select committee of Faculty, Students, and Trustees, has been appointed to begin immediately the search for a successor to Professor Achtemeier. We fully expect to have a Professor of New Testament studies on the scene when classes begin in the fall.

3. We also anticipate that Vice President Sills will be elected to the Presidency of the Penn Central Conference of the United Church of Christ, and are making plans to secure a replacement for his position. All these changes represent losses to us in personnel who have made major contributions to the Seminary. They also provide us opportunity to secure new personnel who will bring their own unique strengths to our common venture in ministry and theological education. Our sense of loss is an expression of our indebtedness to those who have been with us. The loss is very real. But we are optimistic that we can attract to our staff and faculty persons of ability and energy who can assist us in the development of the Seminary. I am greatly encouraged by the addition of Dr. Ringer to our faculty, and look forward to equally strong appointments in the Development Office and in the field of New Testament Studies.

As we make these adjustments, I welcome all counsel from students, faculty, trustees, and friends of the Seminary. These are momentous times for us, full of change, challenge, and opportunity. We are equal to the task.

B. Board of Trustees Meeting

Committees of the Board of Trustees will meet on Thursday, May 3. Both students and faculty will be invited to sit with some of these committees. And I am inviting both Steve Gifford and John Fureman to attend the meeting of the Board on Friday, May 4.

I am hopeful that these occasions will further the dialogue and common planning between trustees, faculty, students, and staff.

NOTE: Interviews with prospective New Testament professors are as follows:
Tuesday, April 24 Dr. Paul Hammer --10:30 a.m. faculty, 1:30 p.m. students
Thursday, April 26 Dr. Wayne Rollins, 1:30 p.m. faculty, 3-4 p.m. students.