

PROFILES: A Giant in the Land: H. Lucille Hager, 1924-2004

by Susan Ebertz

John Trotti in his retirement remarks at the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) annual conference in 2003 mentioned the “giants in the land” who greeted him when he attended his first ATLA conference in 1968. H. Lucille Hager was the host for the 1968 conference and one of the giants on Trotti’s list.¹ As I reflected on his phrase, I wondered what makes a person a giant. It is not only the gifts and abilities for the ministry of theological librarianship that the person possesses. Giants are also ones whose faith has helped them in their vocation and journey. We are theological librarians, and the faith of our particular seminaries and schools of theology inspires us to see from a theological perspective.

The obituary in the *Southeast Missourian* newspaper² tells us that H. Lucille Hager “was born on April 26, 1924, at Cape Girardeau, the daughter of Walter F. and Christine A. Keller Hager.” Lucille Hager had two brothers. “She graduated from Cape Girardeau Central High School in 1941. She was a graduate of Southeast Missouri State University. She received a graduate degree in library science from the University of Illinois.” Hager began her library career at her college alma mater. Her theological librarian ministry started in 1952 when she was hired as a cataloger at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. In 1962, Hager became the director of the library.

Because of events precipitated in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, on February 20, 1974, most of the faculty and students processed off the campus after morning chapel. As they walked, they were singing “Our Church is One Foundation.” This was the beginning of Concordia Seminary in Exile (Seminex), which was later called Christ Seminary. Lucille Hager was one of the faculty members who left. She became the librarian at Seminex. In 1983, when Seminex disbanded, Hager moved with the Seminex library to Austin, Texas, to serve the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest. Though she formally retired in 1989, she continued working until 2002. Hager then returned to Cape Girardeau and died two years later, on July 5, 2004.³

Lucille Hager’s theology can be seen in her personal statement of faith. In 1972, statements of faith were requested by the Council of Presidents of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod of all faculty at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Hager ends her personal statement of faith with these words: “With the continued presence of the Holy Spirit in my life, as I study God’s Holy Word, as I listen to His Holy Word, and as I regularly partake of His holy sacrament, I continue to receive forgiveness of my sins and strengthening of my faith.”⁴ Hager shows her dependence on God for God’s grace in forgiveness and for her strength in faith. The community of the church in preaching and the Eucharist is important

¹ John Trotti, “Retirement Remarks,” *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 57 (2003): 250.

² “Obituaries: H. Lucille Hager,” *Southeast Missourian*, July 6, 2004, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://www.semissourian.com/story/141098.html>.

³ An excellent memorial tribute to Hager may be found in Mikail M. McIntosh-Doty, “H. Lucille Hager (1924-2004),” *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 59 (2005): 285. I have also written about Hager in Susan Ebertz, “Christ Seminary—Seminex Library: From Concordia Seminary in Exile Library to Seminex Legacy Collection,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 38, no. 2 (April 2011): 120.

⁴ H. Lucille Hager, “H. Lucille Hager, Archivist, Director of the Library,” in *Faithful to Our Calling, Faithful to Our Lord: An Affirmation in Two Parts*, by Faculty of Concordia Seminary (Saint Louis, MO) ([St. Louis]: [Concordia Seminary], 1972), 69.

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to Hager. She also believes that God “defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.”⁵ Hager believes in a God who keeps her safe and she need not be afraid.

Lucille Hager was not afraid to be the first woman on the faculty at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis when she was appointed the director of the library. As I wrote of her in an earlier article:

There were very few women library directors and even fewer women seminary library directors [at the time]. Not only was Hager the only female faculty member at Concordia, but she was also tenured. She participated fully in the life of the seminary as a faculty member and had an equal vote in faculty meetings. Her competency can be seen by her successful tenure evaluation and her appointment as the library director despite her gender in a denomination that does not ordain women.⁶

Hager broke new ground by being the first woman faculty member but she did not fear the consequences. Her God was with her.

Hager was not afraid to walk out with the other faculty members. As Edgar Krentz, a faculty colleague, said of her: “Lucille could have stayed at Concordia seminary. No problem. They would have been delighted to have her stay. But she was ... extremely loyal. So she left Concordia seminary with the faculty for Seminex not knowing whether it would ever survive.”⁷

Hager’s theology can also be seen in her statement of faith when she acknowledges that the response to God’s love is to “daily ... thank and praise Him, serve and obey Him.”⁸ She also says, “By His death on the cross, He redeemed me that I might be His own and willingly serve Him by being a true follower of His.”⁹ We can see Hager’s service to God in her ministry of theological librarianship. She used her wonderful organizational abilities to coordinate library moves. In 1955, Edgar Krentz became the library director at Concordia Seminary. He said that the library collection at that time numbered about 40,000. In 1962, when the new library was built, the collection had grown enormously. Krentz estimated it was close to 200,000 volumes. Hager organized the move of that large collection from the old library to the new library. Krentz said that she “had it worked out so that we knew where every shelf of books was going into the new library.”¹⁰ This was probably the largest moving project for which Hager was responsible, though it was not the last moving project she was to organize. Hager moved the Seminex Library five times! Mikail McIntosh-Doty in her memorial tribute to Hager at the 2005 ATLA conference mentions the story of the move to Austin, saying that the books arrived “on a Thursday, by the following Monday, Seminex Library was open for business.”¹¹ Hager used her organizational gifts in service to God.

Hager not only served God through the theological libraries where she worked. Hager was a giant at ATLA. She attended her first conference in 1957 and joined the association in 1960. She served on a number of committees and boards including the Committee on Cataloging and Classification, Nominating Committee, Reader Services Committee, Resolutions Committee, Library Materials Exchange Committee, Index Board, Joint Executive Committee of the Program Boards, and the Board of Directors. Her interests were varied and her expertise was invaluable. Hager hosted the annual conference twice. The first was in 1968 while at Concordia Seminary, and the second was in 1981 while at Seminex. The 1981 participants were housed at Washington University while the sessions were at Christ Seminary (Seminex). Hager was also very involved in SWATLA (Southwest Area Theological Library Association). Her service to these organizations was another way she served God.

⁵ Ibid., 68–69.

⁶ Ebertz, “Christ Seminary--Seminex Library: From Concordia Seminary in Exile Library to Seminex Legacy Collection,” 120.

⁷ Edgar Krentz, interview by author, phone call, November 26, 2014.

⁸ Hager, “H. Lucille Hager, Archivist, Director of the Library,” 69.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Edgar Krentz interview.

¹¹ Mikail M. McIntosh-Doty, “H. Lucille Hager (1924-2004),” *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 59 (2005): 285.

In her statement of faith, Hager also says that she believes that Jesus Christ “daily and richly forgives me all my sins and also the sins of all believers.”¹² Forgiveness is important for Hager. Krentz remembers her as a gracious person.¹³ She was not possessive but would seek the greater good. When Hager moved back to Cape Girardeau, she again attended the church of her childhood, a congregation in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. The walkout in 1974 and the many years as a part of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seminaries (and their precursor denominations) did not keep Hager from returning to the LCMS. Her spirit of forgiveness transcended any feelings of reticence.

The 2009 ATLA *Summary of Proceedings* lists Lucille Hager as a lifetime member. One wonders whether the spirit of Lucille lives on. Perhaps it does in theological librarians who take their faith seriously and see their vocation as ministry and service to God.¹⁴ These are, after all, the true giants in the land.

¹² Hager, “H. Lucille Hager, Archivist, Director of the Library,” 69.

¹³ Edgar Krentz interview.

¹⁴ My special thanks to Edgar Krentz for sharing with me many wonderful stories, Susan Rehwaldt for the many leads for information, and Christopher Sesvold for transcribing the Krentz interview.