

Christ Seminary-Seminex Thirty-Fifth Anniversary

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Building on the One Foundation: Seminex at 35

I greet you in the name of Jesus and I greet you on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which I am privileged to lead as presiding bishop, and on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, which I am also simultaneously seeking to lead as its president.

I can feel in the room the energy that comes from this experience of being reunited. I wish I could have listened in these last few days to both the memories that have shaped you and the way you continue to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. But I have enough sense in my preparation for today that Seminex was formed for the free course of the Gospel, not so you would have a reason 35 years later to come together just to bask in nostalgia.

I think that—more even than the H1N1 virus—the virus of nostalgia is infecting the ELCA, sometimes more than we want to admit. So I have turned to Christopher Lasch often. Listen to a little bit of what he says about nostalgia. “[N]ostalgia seeks to freeze the past providing a temporary buffer against cultural upheaval and the dislocating effect of social change that avoids confrontation with the changing realities of the present.”¹ He goes on to distinguish living memory from nostalgia. I have a hunch that you’ve been about living memory this week more than about nostalgia because, this reunion is about an opportunity for true re-union. It is reuniting those who risked and labored so much for the Gospel but now for a re-newed purpose: a fresh consideration of how to unite again with the vital work of this moment, with new challenges, and new opportunities—more even than that with new opportunities for renewal in service that is as fresh and new as the Gospel itself.

You know that I come from a different tradition than you although it’s interesting coming out of the Hauge pietist tradition. One week a few years ago I preached one Sunday at the little country church where the Hauge Synod was formed. The next Saturday I was in New York, preaching for the anniversary of the Augustana Synod and I had to confess to them that I felt more at home with them than with my own ancestral roots. I probably would say the same to you today, but don’t tell the Haugians in the ELCA.

So this morning I want to try to capture some of this reuniting and reinvigorating that I think you bring to the ELCA today. One of the continuing formative theologians in my ministry continues to be one who taught at this seminary, Joseph Sittler. He has taught

¹ Paraphrased in Penny Long Marler, “Lost in the Fifties: The Changing Family and the Nostalgic Church” *Work, Family and Religion in Contemporary Society*, Nancy Tatom Ammerman and Wade Clark Roof, eds. (Routledge: New York, NY, 1995) 26. See also Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1991) pp. 82-83.

me and continues to teach me. I'm at that stage in life when I go back and re-read things a second, third, and fourth time. I don't know if it's about memory retention or just because it's so rich. Sittler is one of those. He has taught me to pay attention to the full ecology of God's grace. I love this statement from Sittler, "What I am appealing for is an understanding of grace that has the magnitude of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The grace of God is not simply a holy hypodermic whereby my sins are forgiven. It is the whole giftedness of life, the wonder of life which causes me to ask questions that transcend the moment."²

That's in part why we Lutherans consider the vocation of education so important, isn't it? The grace of God frees us to ask questions that transcend the moment. For Sittler, tending to the giftedness of life includes attending to environmental and ecological questions. From Sittler, I've learned to tend—or maybe a better word would be steward—theologically the whole ecology of our life together in Christ.

This leads me to Craig Dykstra. Dr. Dykstra is vice president for religion at the Lilly Endowment. It was Dr. Dykstra who, a couple of years ago, first used this image for the ELCA, describing what he saw as the particular uniqueness of the ELCA on the American landscape today. He said that the ELCA understands itself to be an ecology of interdependent ecosystems and seeks to steward that interdependence for the sake of what those various ecosystems in the ecology of the ELCA bring to the proclaiming of Christ in God's mission in the world.³ I think that's a helpful metaphor and when I use it with young adults, they get it right away. It seems the older the audience, the more they look a bit perplexed. But it helps us to understand that the ELCA today is more than an idea that exists in organizational diagrams and charts.

The image of the ELCA as an ecology of interdependent ecosystems communicates that we are a community in Christ, full of vitality and life. Within this vitality and this community, there is both rich diversity and complexity that can't be described or captured or understood in a flat, one-dimensional way.

We talk about each of the three expressions of this church as one part of that interdependent ecosystem. But we even go beyond that. We don't just talk about the three expressions—synods, churchwide, and congregations. We increasingly talk about the variety of ecosystems that make up this ecology: the ecosystem of theological education centered in our eight seminaries, the ecosystem of 28 colleges and universities, the ecosystem of campus ministries and outdoor ministries and schools; and also ecosystems of gatherings of educators, youth and family ministers, and evangelists. We are pondering seriously the possibility of training a thousand evangelists, learning from our global companions and sending them out to do probes before we begin to plant new ministries. This is an exciting time to be the recipients of those companion relationships, isn't it? Those thousand trained evangelists could become an ecosystem within this church.

That brings me to an image I have of Seminec and Christ Seminary. Although you were not a seminary of this church, as I read your history and as I witness your life and leadership in this church, I think you continue to function as one vibrant ecosystem that

² Joseph Sittler, *Gravity and Grace: Reflections and Provocations*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986) 14.

³ 2005 Churchwide Assembly Reports and Records: Assembly Minutes (Chicago: Office of the Secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2006) 76.

gives life and vitality to the whole ecology of the ELCA and our sense that our ecology is framed in the larger ecology of the body of Christ catholic.

With that lens, I want to do some reflecting with you. I want to do three things. I want to give thanks for the witness of this legacy that you bear. I also want to think imaginatively with you about how this legacy can continue to serve the free course of the Gospel at this moment. And I want to do that around some questions and some invitations for your particular engagement and contribution to the life of the ELCA. Thanksgivings, questions, and invitations.

Thanksgivings

I have five thanksgivings. The first is for students. As Ed Schroeder notes in a *Crossings* newsletter the past winter, in the fall of 1973 and 1974, attention had been focused on the seminary and denominational leaders, presidents, boards, right up to the day when John Tietjen was suspended as president of Concordia Seminary by the board of control. Speculation, as I read, re-centered on what would happen to the faculty members. From a distance, it appears it could have followed the trajectory of a conventional—if still uniquely and painfully institutional—power struggle. But then, it seems it was the students that acted in a way that was and remains not surprising. Not because anyone now or then could rightly think them incapable of such a thing, but because when it happens it always has the unexpected and surprising effect of what brings the new. The students acted as a community of faith. You made a communal confession. In refusing to attend classes while teachers were being discredited by vague and broad accusations of faithlessness, you created a fresh opening for a liberated witness. In your action as students, you created an open space. From the accusations and judgments, you literally tried to open a space, as I sense it, where a confession of Christ could be freely made with renewed hope and imagination.

It was really in the action of students that this birthing of a new ecosystem was born that now brings life and vitality to the ELCA. Here was something new in the ecology of American Lutheranism and Christianity. In the years that followed, as I read it and heard it from colleagues, it was students that began to form new trajectories in ministry that I think we're continuing to build upon, learn from, and sometimes seek to replicate—or at least reform.

You had new partnerships in ministry in the United States and outside the United States. You found new places to do internships and creative ways to do them with LCA congregations or international Lutheran congregations. I heard that you did some work with Methodists. Maybe you were the forerunners to the 30 years of dialogue that hopefully will now lead to full communion with the Methodist Church. You explored worker-priest callings, something I think has lagged too far behind and that we still need to look at as ways to do ministry in the future. You brought a passion and you brought imagination to theological education. I mean, among what other body of Lutheran seminary students but Christ Seminary-Seminex would Luther's teaching of the blessed exchange between Christ and the believer receive the imaginative moniker of the "sweet swap." I mean, that preaches today. (Laughter) So I give thanksgiving for students.

In the *Crossings* article, the great picture of "On Strike" or "Exile"—you remember that picture? It brought to mind a similar or parallel experience I was having at Union. My father was an evangelist who all his life prayed I would go to seminary. When I came

home and told him I had a Rockefeller to go to any seminary and that I was going to Union in New York, he began to weep and he said, “I never knew I should be praying where you’d go to seminary.” (Laughter) And then he said, “Can’t you at least go to Princeton? They still believe in the Bible there.” (Laughter) Lo and behold, one day, we as Union students decided to go on strike. I was designated to go outside—I think it was because I was Lutheran—take my roommate’s shoe and nail the “On Strike” sign to the door of Union Seminary. (Laughter) A photographer snapped the picture and put it on the front page of the *National Catholic Reporter*. Now, my dad had Parkinson’s. He was sitting back in St. Paul and somebody brings him this picture. Now, my dad leaned as far away from the Vatican as you could lean as a Lutheran and wanted me not to go to Union Seminary. Then to be nailing the “On Strike” sign up with my ponytail flapping in the wind (Laughter) ... but I have a hunch I’m in a room full of people like that. (Laughter) (Applause)

A second thanksgiving is for you teachers. There were 45, but I want to give collective witness and thanksgiving for all of the faculty who formed and led and taught. It was a communal expression of collective witness by the faculty who nurtured you students. And I think such a communal confession can only emerge where a faculty also makes a confession that was larger than the idiosyncratic assertions of any individual scholars or any tensions between various professional and academic disciplines, whether it’s about historical criticism or the inerrancy of Scripture. Interestingly enough—if we had time—those seem to be the places we’re still stuck in our semi-annual meetings with LCMS. It was a community of teachers who could offer a common confession of their faith with all the rich textures of your individual lives and your wisdom and your theological formation that collectively and communally came to life. Thanks be to God for teachers faithful to their calling and faithful to their Lord.

As important as students and faculty are, neither would come into being or thrive as an ecosystem then or now without being joined to a larger community of people. So I’m calling this the broader community of Christ Seminary-Seminex. Students had come to Concordia Seminary well-prepared by other faculties, other teachers who were a critical network of supporters during that time. There were pastors who organized support. There were congregations who provided funding. There were district officials who assisted in the placement of first calls. Financial supporters. Colleagues at LSTC here, at Eden, at St. Louis University. Friends and family who spoke their passions, offered their hands in peace, and opened their arms in love. All partners in confession. Together you and they were testifying to the reality of Christ’s body united in witness in all the bonds of relationships from professional to familial. So a third thanksgiving for the Seminex community, now a new and thriving ecosystem in American Lutheranism of which today we are the beneficiaries.

A fourth thanksgiving is more abstract. I’ve been speaking a lot lately that this is a time that calls for evangelical, missional imagination within the vitality and vibrancy of the whole ecology of the ELCA. About a year and half ago, I was called by a *New York Times* reporter. She was doing a feature article on declining, dying denominations and their leaders and wanted to interview me. (Laughter) She asked me, “So what do you think is the principal role for the leader of a declining, dying denomination?”

And I said two things. “I believe I am called to steward the vibrancy of our dynamic ecology of interdependent ecosystems, and I am called to pray that the Spirit will stir among us a sense of evangelical, missional imagination.”

And she said, “I have no idea what either of those mean.” (Laughter) She also was not particularly interested in finding out so I avoided being in her story. (Laughter Applause)

As I read the history of Christ Seminary-Seminex and as I have heard from many of you, that’s what was going on then: evangelical, missional imagination. I’m not going to fall into the temptation to name names, but some of you colleagues in this room, now in teaching and leadership positions, are bringing that kind of leaven to the ELCA. One little place that it’s continued is in the work of the *Crossings* community. Working to bring the Gospel into its clearest, most evangelical, most missional, most winsome, and sharpest expression as it engages the full life of the baptized enables us to engage in God’s world. So I want to give thanks for all of the crossings of the intersections with life in the world, for *Crossings* itself, and also for your continued contributions.

A fifth thanksgiving is for confession: the witness of faith that this community offered to the church in the world in its evangelical, missional imagination. When asked to give account, the faculty answered faithfully—not in an academic way but by stating what is and still is at the heart of our lives of faith. I quote, “At stake is the centrality of the Gospel in our faith, our lives, our theology, our ministry, and God’s mission to the world through us. The issue in the Synod is not academic freedom for the Faculty of Concordia Seminary but the need to stand fast in the Gospel freedom wherewith Christ has freed all members of His Church.”⁴ I quote from *Faithful To Our Calling, Faithful To Our Lord. Part 1* But this witness of Jesus Christ was not unique to the faculty of Christ Seminary-Seminex, nor unique for us today in the body of Christ. Just as sunlight, wind, water, seed, and soil are present throughout an entire ecology, and not just in one ecosystem, so your witness that Jesus Christ—who is the light of the world, the living water, the breath of life, the very seed of life that falls to the earth and dies in order to bring life to the world and the soil in which the church sinks its root—this Jesus Christ must live and lives in all of the ecosystems of the ecologies of Christ body, the church. Wherever new life in Jesus Christ takes root and blossoms into the full and rich life of a thriving community of faith, we sing confidently “The Church’s One Foundation is Jesus Christ Our Lord.” We rightly give thanks for all of our lives that have been enriched by your confession of faith.

Questions

Five thanksgivings, but I have two questions that I want to put before you and I need you to help us struggle with them. We noted in the liturgy this morning, the 479th anniversary of the presentation of the *Augsburg Confession*. And now, in that single volume called the *Book of Concord*, two terms were joined—*confessio* and *concordia*—confession and concord. Obviously, in these almost 500 years, *confessio* and *concordia* have not always shared a peaceful co-existence. The reality is that the life of confessional theologians, confessional preachers, a confessional church, a community always has been forced to face the reality of discord and disharmony. You know this perhaps better than I.

⁴ Faculty of Concordia Seminary. *Faithful To Our Calling, Faithful To Our Lord. Part 1*. St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, (Public Domain: 1973) 3 (Preamble)

Already at Augsburg, to be a confessor meant to be a defendant—in defense of the Gospel—at least implicitly disobedient to institutional authority. The irony, of course, is that the very confession of the Gospel necessarily also involves a confession of the unity that is in Christ. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (NRSV, Galatians 3:28) Or as we read in Ephesians, “For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” (NRSV, Ephesians 2:14)

Not surprising to you, I’m spending a lot of time these days praying and pondering about confession and concord, about confession of unity in Christ, and the seeming disunity that exists around questions of human sexuality. I’ve sometimes wondered out loud, “Does ELCA stand for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or does it stand for Expectations Low, Climbing Anxiety?” We are a church with low expectations of what the Holy Spirit can do through the Gospel and we have climbing anxiety about human sexuality. I’ve turned to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together* and I’m struck by how even in the community of which he was a part—shattered by the disillusionment of disappointed idealism about real sin—he still could recognize the presence of Christian unity. What he says is so applicable to where we are in the ELCA today and also speaks to what you experienced as Christ Seminary-Seminex. It’s familiar to many of you.

Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial. They act as if they have to create the Christian community, as if their visionary ideal binds the people together. Whatever does not go their way, they call a failure. When their idealized image is shattered, they see the community breaking into pieces. So they first become accusers of other Christians in the community, then accusers of God, and finally the desperate accusers of themselves. Because God already has laid the only foundation of our community, because God has united us in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that life together with other Christians, not as those who make demands, but as those who thankfully receive. We thank God for what God has done for us. We thank God for giving us other Christians who live by God’s call, forgiveness, and promise. Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the common life, is not the one who sins still a person with whom I too stand under the word of Christ? Will not another Christian’s sin be an occasion for me ever anew to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ? Therefore, will not the very moment of great disillusionment with my brother or sister be incomparably wholesome for me because it so thoroughly teaches me that both of us can never live by our own words and deeds, but only by that one Word and deed that really binds us together, the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ? The bright day of Christian community dawns wherever the early morning mists of dreamy visions are lifting.⁵

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible* in Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 36-37.

What do we, who claim the Augsburg Confession, say? That it's not simply a matter of antiquarian interest, a curiosity about the problems of Christians in the first or sixteenth century, of confessing Christians in Germany in the 1930s, or of Lutherans in St. Louis in the 1970s. As I said earlier, we are here to reunite with the vital work of this moment and that work includes this question, "Does being a Christ confessor inevitably devolve into the divisiveness of confessionalism? And if not, how will it not?"

In the larger ELCA, in the larger Lutheran communion globally that I lead, in the Christian community which includes not only our ecumenical and global partners, but truly the whole Christian church on earth in the body of Christ today, we still confront this challenge. How do we confess Christ faithfully and do so in a way that continues to honor the unity that is God's gift to us in Christ? I believe the challenge of this moment calls for our best witness, that which comes not just from our keen intellects, but also from the charity of our hearts and the integrity of our lives all formed in Christ Jesus. How do Christ confessors faithfully confess the unity that is in Jesus Christ?

Where we are in our relationships with the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod is still, I think, around these questions. You know that in 2001, the LCMS Convention passed a resolution deeming the ELCA to be heterodox. So in our semi-annual Committee on Lutheran Cooperation conversations, we asked them to bring a paper that would theologically and confessionally give the groundings for how we had been deemed in their eyes now to be heterodox. They asked us to bring a theological paper grounding our full communion agreements in our confessional self-understanding. It was a very interesting dialogue. We asked Tim Wengert to do the paper they had requested from us. I surmise that they were quite surprised that we could do it. (Laughter) Tim did a very thoughtful, confessionally-grounded explication of how we have moved as the ELCA, retaining our confessional identity as a Lutheran church, into full communion with then five partners. What was very interesting was that their paper gave no confessional basis for our being judged heterodox, but only described the politics within the LCMS that led up to that action in 2001.

For the next round, we went back to the "Function of Doctrine and Theology in Light of the Unity of the Church" or FODT report. It was published in 1978 under the umbrella of the Lutheran Council in the USA (LCUSA). Its focus was the theological issues that separated Lutheran church bodies at the time. We asked Ralph Bohlmann and H. George Anderson, who both were part of that study to come and reflect today with us. For the LCMS, the issues were the same with us as they were then, even though in our self-understanding, we had moved quite significantly.

We're committed to doing Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, and Lutheran Services in America, military chaplains, and Lutheran Disaster Response together although we've been given notice that if we adopt the recommendations at the assembly in August as they are before the church, the relationship will be strained.

So concord and confession was the first question. The second is a metaphor, the image of exile and exodus. Perhaps it was because of the intense focus on questions about the interpretation of Scripture, especially questions about the Old Testament, the Hebrews scriptures, perhaps it was because of the liberated imagination of the students, but—for whatever reason—Seminex-Christ Seminary appropriated the imagery, the lens, the narrative of the scriptures in profoundly powerful ways symbolically, especially the

theme of exile and the imagery associated with it. For instance, that image that I think you used of the new branch growing from a severed stump, right?

As you know, the appropriation of religious symbols is as complicated as it is powerful. The Old Testament scriptures themselves, in speaking of exile, drew on symbols of Israel's slavery and exodus from Egypt just as Christian preachers and prophetic theologians have drawn on these powerful symbols and experiences today. Implicit in these is an appropriation where judgments are made on the powerful and the privileged, especially in the prophetic witness before, during, and after exile. The judgment was less on foreign and alien powers than on Israel's own leaders and Israel itself. When Israel comes and returns to the place where it experienced the renewal of God's promise, a tension remains with the temptations of the moment. Will Israel fall again into faithless fascination with the idolatries of the moment or will it fall captive once again to a heartless piety that disdains the poor and outcasts and sacrifices justice and mercy to a shallow and rigid piety?

How do those powerful images function for us today in our life as a church? Do they cement people in prisons of self-vindication and judgment or postures of victimhood and hostility? Or do they liberate communities to live freely and generously in hope? Again, the question is not simply antiquarian for a community of faith that has self-consciously captured that image as part of your narrative.

Think about the sexuality studies of the past years. We've called it *Journeying Together Faithfully*, and yet now—even as we lead up to August—people are beginning to use images of exile and exodus to define their possible relationships within this church. Think about the movement of people in and out of our country in patterns of migration and immigration, and how images of exile and exodus inform our life together in the world. How do those images inform our relentless working first to accompany Palestinian Lutheran Christians in what is increasingly their exodus and exile, but also in the seeking to find a lasting and just peace in the land called holy?

One of the major things we now must ask is how we live as Christians faithful to the Gospel with persons of other faiths so that we deepen our understanding of them and they of us, but we also find common cause together to build worlds of justice and peace. I've been privileged to accept an invitation to be on President Obama's task force advising him on inter-religious relationships in this country and the world. Our first contribution was to work with his speech writer on the speech he gave in Egypt, a hopeful sign that he is drawing on the wisdom of various perspectives as he leads us.

Invitations

Three invitations. The first is regarding theological education. We're asking a whole host of questions literally led by our eight seminary presidents and stewarded by churchwide staff to create a vibrant ecology of theological education and formation for this church as we go forward. Questions like: "Does theological education formation begin with or center around a school, a community of learning, a resource center for professional ministerial development, or a curriculum? If not that, what? What's the relationship between sustainability and innovation, between established institutions and entrepreneurs? What kind of partnerships do we need for theological education? How do we develop resources? How do we sustain them as a part of the wider ecology?"

A small study group will form the charter for a look over the next 18 months at the whole ecology of the ELCA. The ecology has been served well by the work of the Committee on the New Lutheran Church (CNLC). However, we are now 22 years into the life of this church. I think we've got to take a fairly intense but focused look at how this ecology sustains us for the next chapter in our life and witness in the world. What ecosystems do we need in the ecology as we go forward? How do we draw upon our deep and full communion partnerships? How do we sustain our global companion relationships? What will it mean to be this church engaged in proclaiming Christ as we go forward? The sustaining vibrancy of the ecosystem of theological education is certainly one of those major foci that the seminary presidents have invited us to join in looking at.

The second invitation is around the theme of emergence. Although change is constant and is present at every moment in history, a large number of voices around us are saying that our culture is at a moment of historic change in religious and spiritual life in the American culture and perhaps in the whole global civilization.

I just have started reading Phyllis Tickle's *Great Emergence* because everyone quotes it to me so I decided that I need to read it. If any of you have read it and have a critique on it, send it to bishop@elca.org. I'd love to hear what you think. I told you the story about the perception that we are in decline as a denomination and that we no longer hold privileged positions in American public life. But now the center of attention has shifted, depending on your perspective, to mega-churches or to Pentecostal churches, and from North to South.

I'm very interested in the emerging-church phenomena in Christianity. I pay a lot of attention to Nadia Bolz-Weber, who's doing an emerging-church ministry in Denver called the House for All - Sinners and Saints. She is edgy but sends me thoughtful e-mails periodically.

I want to share a quote from one of her e-mails because there is something particularly intriguing to me about the emerging church movement that brings the ancient and the contemporary together. When my kids have gone there, they've been much more drawn to it than some of what 40-year-olds are drawn to in a praise service. This is what Nadia says:

I firmly believe that we, as Lutherans, are uniquely poised to be a church in an urban and post-modern context. Our rich liturgical heritage brings with it the gifts of ancient ritual and mystery. This speaks to those who seek that which cannot be explained or who wish to touch the sacred in a arational and embodied ways. Our theology is full of ambiguity, which is actually comforting to most post-moderns. We do not spoon-feed theological certainty but live most comfortably in the discomfoting tension of being both sinner and saint, living in the now and the not-yet of God's kingdom here on earth. Our theology of the cross, the proclamation of a self-emptying God who would rather die than be in the sin-accounting business, is rich and dark and nourishing to those who suspect, based on their own lived experience, that it's not really finally all about happy clappy victory parties. Then the proclamation of the lush grace of God which simply *is* washes over us in the proclamation of the Good News that in Christ we are the beloved of God.

I think we need to pay attention. One learning about ecology and ecosystems is the role of ecotones in the emergence of new life. Do you know what an ecotone is? It's really the border between two ecosystems. It's often in the ecotone that new life comes forth, that then permeates and goes to both or many of the ecosystems. It's really new life on the margins, new forms and expressions of Christian life and witness. In one sense, Christ Seminary and Seminex was a kind of ecotone.

Hermes, the god in Greek mythology, is the god of the boundary crossings. And when we talk about hermeneutics, we go from the boundary of the text to the context of our lives. I'm increasingly wondering about the hermeneutics for our missiology. Too often when it comes to missiology, we have a hermeneutic of diminishment or a hermeneutic of decline or a hermeneutic of nostalgia or a hermeneutic of fear. But what kind of hermeneutic does the theology of the cross give us? Is it not a hermeneutic of joy? And there is such an absence of talking about joy. We need conversation about emergence and life at the boundaries, at the ecotones.

The last invitation is one that I picked up in reading Robert Bertram's *A Time for Confessing*. I didn't get through it all, but focused on the conversation around public witness. One of the commitments of the ELCA is to see ourselves increasingly as a public church with a public voice that begins with the public proclamation of Word and sacrament, in public worship that sends people into the publics of their lives to live as the baptized.

I do a whole riff on blues a lot lately and talk about the activities of the church as a riffing. What are the bass chords? I think the bass chords for us Lutherans is the affirmation of baptism. When the pastor says, "Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism: (And then those five bass chords are struck.) Live among God's faithful people. (Communal) Hear God's Word and share in the Lord's supper. (Sacramental) Proclaim the Good News of Christ in word and deed. (Evangelical) Serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus. (Diaconal) Strive for justice and peace in all the earth. (Agitational)"⁶ (Laughter) Maybe you can find another word. That's the one I go with. (Laughter) So I'm convinced that we're finally shedding the label that so often has been attached to us: that we're quietists, that we are passivists—not pacifists—when it comes to our engagement in public life. But we need to find a way not to settle for the false choice between alternatives of disengagement with public life or empty moralizing.

I think it starts in my passion for preaching. We're starting conversations all over this church about preaching. If you're on the roster, you got an e-letter from me recently calling us to a deepened conversation about what Gospel we are preaching. And that's what I hear in Bob Bertram, "By emphasizing the 'one gospel-and-sacraments,' the only one that is 'enough,' I am recalling the apostolic warning that there are after all other, rival gospels that need to be exposed for the counterfeits they are."⁷

I think the pressing issue for this church is: what Gospel are we preaching and what counterfeit gospels are seducing us, whether it's a prosperity gospel or a self-help gospel or a morality gospel or a gospel that we're going to save ourselves by our right political

⁶ *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006) 236.

⁷ Robert W. Bertram, *A Time for Confessing* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008) 137.

engagements? There are hosts of gospels, but globally for us Lutherans as well as the ELCA, the question of what gospel are we preaching is one that we need to continue to ask, for it's at the heart of who you are and the ecology and the ecosystem that you bring to this church.

Thank you for your public witness and for all you continue to bring. I invite your continued engagement with the questions I have raised with you and the ones you have raised among yourselves this week. Thank you very much.